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Only the ability to read by a given individual proves that what is written shares in the power of writing, a power based on something that goes beyond the individual.

—Italo Calvino

There is a crack in everything.
That's how the light gets in.

—Leonard Cohen

University of Alberta

Belonging and Homelessness in 'Post-Modern' Alberta Literature: Community at the Limits of Discourse

by

Jonathan Fredrick Gordon ©

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Abstract

Belonging and Homelessness in 'Post-Modern' Alberta Literature: Community at the Limits of Discourse addresses the role of literature in establishing community, building "home," but also in revealing the persistence of excess beyond apparently universal mythic structures. In performing this exploration, it reads Robert Kroetsch's *What the Crow Said*; Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*; Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere*; and Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* within a framework drawing on the theories of George Grant, Ian Angus, Jean-Luc Nancy, and others. It raises questions of place, space, history, community, indigeneity, story, and silence, maintaining that texts' particular answers to these questions move from the concerns of a particular place to touch upon an excessive, universal, silent alterity. Revealing this excess without appropriating it suggests an ethic of respect allowing communication between the self and the other, while disrupting such binaries.

Focusing on "post-modern" "Alberta" literature, *Belonging and Homelessness* worries the process of categorization while recognizing the necessity of categories for the purposes of communication. It suggests that "Alberta" be understood to signify a contested, constructed intersection of various aspects of particularity, which enable one way for us to say "we," to perform the sharing of community. While some responses to modernity's home-building projects have been to attempt to embrace homelessness, nomadism, "virtual" community, or cosmopolitanism, this project maintains that such attempts are not simply liberating, but also potentially homogenizing, and that a defence of what Grant calls "one's own" is necessary for whatever good is available to us. Writing in Alberta, even writing that has been classified as "post-modern," performs this

defence. However, this defence can easily slide into parochialism. Literature is necessary to the task of interrupting mythic representations of community as natural and permanent, that community is a category with fixed content. This project seeks to speak toward the silence surrounding four Alberta novels, but also to show how these novels offer a different story of belonging by recognizing that the stories of this place are both necessary and contingent, and always involve both productivity and excess.

For Grandma

Acknowledgements

The completion of this text marks the completion of a decade of post-secondary study. It is hard to believe that ten years have passed since I arrived in Edmonton as a first-year English major at the University of Alberta. It is harder yet to imagine adequately thanking all of the people who have helped me get to this point. Nevertheless, I must try, recognizing that the inadequacy of such an attempt to express a feeling in language provides an impetus to try again. I would like to thank, first and foremost, Elizabeth Willson Gordon, my partner in every way; Brian and Eunice Gordon; Stan and Verlyn Willson; the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta; Paul Hjartarson, who took a chance on an unknown kid who showed up at his door one day with a completely unworkable thesis proposal, and, from there, provided all the guidance, stability, and humour I needed; Stephen Slemon and Cecily Devereux (who were familiar with some of the work I had done to that point and signed on anyway); Daniel Coleman, for providing such an incisive and illuminating reading under difficult circumstances; Harvey Krahn, for exhibiting genuine interest and bringing both intellectual curiosity and rigor to bear on unfamiliar terrain; the Department of English at the University of Western Ontario; all of my students over the past seven years who have given me the opportunity to become conscious of some of my biases; and all of the friends and family who asked "what are you working on again?" especially those who were not satisfied with my stock answer of "a study of Alberta literature and community" and forced me to think through a coherent, if tenuous, summary statement. I would also like gratefully to acknowledge financial support for this project from the University of Alberta (including its Department of English and Film Studies, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research,

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Although this text will bear my name as author, such an individualist claim of possession is one of the myths this project seeks to interrupt. This text would never have achieved any sort of completed existence if it were not for the co-existence that I share with so many others, both those acknowledged here and the infinite, sacrificed, unacknowledged other others whose calls I have not heeded while doing my duty in writing this. While whatever may be good in this text is the product of a process of creative sharing and exchange for which I cannot take credit, I take responsibility for any and all of its failings, errors, omissions, and inaccuracies. The submission of this dissertation as partial requirement for the PhD degree at the University of Alberta marks a sort of closure; my only hope for this text is that whoever may read it engages in the critical practice of reopening and preventing me from having the last word.

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Introduction: Belonging

> Hearing the silence of the world, the failure of the world to announce meaning, we tell stories. [. . .] We tell stories, and then, hearing our stories told, we ask if their meaning is in the content, or in the telling itself. As critics we elaborate the doubt that our stories were intended to contain.
>
> —*Robert Kroetsch*, "Beyond Nationalism: A Prologue" (1989)

> No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his [sic] involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society. These continue to bear on what he does professionally, even though naturally enough his research and its fruit attempt to reach a level of relative freedom from the inhibitions and the restrictions of brute, everyday reality.
>
> —*Edward Said*, Orientalism (1978)

I was raised on a farm four and a half miles south east of Paradise Valley: NW 20-46-2-W4th Meridian, as Robert Kroetsch might begin (again). Today I live in Edmonton. The farm is three hours away. When I made the decision to pursue my doctorate, my older brother was planning to farm and the line of succession seemed clear. I was free to do other things with the certainty that the farm would be there, an origin to which I could return whenever the desire struck. Recently, though, my brother has decided that farming may not be for him and has moved into Lloydminster. When I learned of this, my initial reaction was selfish. I was afraid of what would become of the farm; Dad talked of selling; and I blamed Tim. Where would my "home" be? Given time to reflect, though, I recognized that this was an old story, a story almost as old as that of European settler/invaders' history on the prairies. Movement from rural to urban is a story of Canada, and Tim's decision was not evidence of his personal moral failure or proof of the inadequacy of the Gordons as farmers. What was the story that led me to jump to these conclusions? Why did the "home place" still play such a role in my personal mythology in this age of plural, hybrid, contingent identities, global citizenship, and cosmopolitanism? If the sale of Gordoncrest Farms Ltd. was to cause a crisis of personal identity, why didn't I go "home" and maintain it? Part of me wanted to—still wants to—but where did such a desire come from? Indeed, what was there to maintain when the "culture" of farming has become so overwritten by "agribusiness" that "home" is a limited private corporation? Why did the thought of the farm being sold make me feel displaced, dispossessed? What right did I have to be "placed" to start with when displacement and migration are so ubiquitous? Surely the "farm-boy-leaving-the-farm" is a story that has already been told (many times). What were the stories that structured my response, and what relevance did they have in this "modern" world?

Belonging and Homelessness is my attempt to answer these personal questions in such a way that the answers move beyond a merely solipsistic process of self-reflection and open out to offer some illumination on the role of stories in society more generally. I begin from the premise that insofar as we belong anywhere, we belong in stories. As such, stories, and storytelling, are key sites of inquiry for an understanding of belonging. However, at the same time, the doubt surrounding any claims to belonging will not be contained by stories. Excess persists: given the collapse of "meta-narratives" in the "post-modern" age, those stories that were intended to contain excessive and overwhelming silence at a level of abstraction greater than any particular story, we are faced with this doubt more directly than ever before. The capacity of stories to provide a sense of belonging, a connection to something larger than the self, either in a shared understanding of content or a shared experience of story-telling as performance, is itself in doubt.

In Alberta, the "pioneer story" continues to have some purchase on the popular consciousness as the means by which "belonging" was established here for settler/invaders.[1] However, its "truth" does not succeed in containing the doubt that surrounds it. Kroetsch asks, "[h]ow do you write in a new country?" (*Lovely* 5). The "newness" of the country remains at issue, though, and the avowal of this newness in Alberta stories attempts to contain doubt as it provides an origin on which to inscribe belonging. Before asking this question, Kroetsch remembers his father explaining to him how buffalo made their wallows: "[w]hat buffalo? [he] asked" (1). This disrupts his certainty in "the illusion that the land [his] parents and grandparents homesteaded had had no prior occupants, animal or human. Ours was the ultimate *tabula rasa*" (1). Kroetsch's experience of newness is, as he notes, not an origin but one in a series of beginnings (15), a beginning always in tension with what precedes and exceeds it, a silent otherness that his story cannot contain. Writing in a "new" country already constitutes a re-writing, a writing over. The challenge becomes, then, one of reconciling "[o]ur inherited literature, the literature of our European past and of eastern North America, [which] is emphatically the literature of a people who have not lived on prairies" (Kroetsch 5) with this place (both its natural environment and history) such that one does not simply seek to contain and control its other. This task is undertaken in the stories we tell of this place and our relation to it. However, while I maintain that such a particular understanding is necessary for whatever degree of belonging that is possible here—what Kroetsch calls "a local pride," which "does not exclude the rest of the world, or other experiences; rather, it makes them possible" (6)—a danger lies in the fact that such pride "leads us to a concern with myths of origin" (6). The danger lies not in this concern itself, necessarily, but in the destructive potential of the stories that such concern tends to generate, the notion that there is nothing outside of this story, a *tabula rasa*. While some responses to the destructive consequences of modernity's home-building projects have been to embrace homelessness, nomadism, "virtual" community, or cosmopolitanism, this project maintains that such attempts are not simply liberating, but also potentially homogenizing, and that a defence of what George Grant calls "one's own" is necessary for whatever good is available to us. Writing in Alberta, even writing that has been classified as "post-modern," performs this defence.

However, insofar as "my own" is the legacy of settler/invaders in Alberta, its relation to "the good" is full of doubt because it bears the burden of the consequences of one story's attempts to contain otherness. Literary critic Dick Harrison shows how, on the prairies, settler/invaders—in maintaining their worldview, their "eastern eyes," and seeking to impose it on the 'new' land—engaged in a process of domination. To become "indigenous," to establish belonging, the pioneer imagination met the challenge of the new land, the homelessness they experienced on it, "by surveying, fencing, building—anything to capture the new space within a known order" (Harrison x). These projects, described, explained, and justified in the literature Harrison examines, are also undertaken from within belief in a particular story. This story—which we might call a discourse, that which "generates certain kinds of questions, placed within systems that legitimate, support, and answer those questions" (Bové 54)—is that of progress, which promises belonging as its end and rationalizes the reduction of everything else to the status of means to achieve that end. This story promises that the excessive doubt generated by the silent other can ultimately be contained through work. Attempts to construct belonging through "surveying, fencing, building" can serve to cover over the buffalo, to imply that the homes of today were built on a *tabula rasa* rather than over a previous set of particularities.

It is, however, important to recognize the otherness that exceeds any home-making project and persists despite those projects. While Harrison suggests that contemporary writers "identify the Indian as the one potential 'ancestor' who is close to the soil, organically and elementally connected with it" (199), such an identification cannot synthesize difference and integrate it into a higher level in a dialectical progression toward a teleological end. Diana Brydon writes that "[t]he current flood of books by white Canadian writers embracing Native spirituality clearly serves a white need to feel at home in this country and to assuage the guilt felt over a material appropriation by making it a cultural one as well" ("White" 196). For these writers "the Indian" is not an ancestor. Ian Angus describes an alternative relationship:

> [t]he interplay between inside and outside occurs both for myself and for the other though in a manner that cannot be mediated by a dialectic because the positions cannot be made reversible. It thus does not culminate in a synthesis, but in a respect for the Otherness of the other, a recognition of difference not an *alter ego*, a letting go of the desire to be completely in charge of human universality. [. . .] every human individual exists in a relation between particularity and universality. But the universality is only available through the mediation of the Other's particularity, which I can only see as practices from the outside. (*Border* 161)

The search for the origin of pure belonging inevitably leads both to the indigenous inhabitants of this place and to wilderness, but to claim them as "ancestors" for people to whom this place remains "new" is to appropriate that otherness in an attempt to be in charge of the universal, the essence, to belong absolutely in this place. Literature is the focus of this project because it, in my understanding, following Jean-Luc Nancy, resists, to a greater or lesser degree, the reduction of diversity required by a belief in "progress." Stories have home-making capacity; this takes a particular form in Alberta. Stories structure the belonging of individuals and communities and their relations to each other, and, at the same time, stories touch upon the excess that persists outside that system of containment called belonging. This project seeks to elaborate the doubt that exceeds four Alberta novels, but also to show how these novels offer a new story of belonging by recognizing that this is not new country and that its origins cannot be captured to provide a foundation for a story of belonging. That is, these novels tell stories that attempt to elaborate their own doubt rather than contain it.

Belonging and Homelessness is about finding a way to be in the world given the oppression carried out by those with whom I share so much, and whose legacy I have inherited, without simply rejecting those identifications. Even if I were to reject my personal identifications as much as possible, whatever that might mean, my ability to do that would still have been enabled by my privileged particularities, my ability to choose. Given the impossibility of simply escaping the history I was born into, how can I prevent that history from repeating its domination through me? How can I justify my continued (privileged) presence in the world? How can I belong? Smaro Kamboureli argues that "[t]he objective [of the diasporic critic] is neither to construct an opposition nor to effect a balance between [. . .] positions; instead, it is to produce a space where her [sic] hybridity is articulated in a manner that does not cancel out any of its particularities"

(22). I would add that this articulation must also not cancel out the particularities of others. The possibility of producing such a space of non-hierarchical community within the historical place now called "Alberta," through narrative, may, I believe, offer a way for my particularity to continue without dominating others' particularities.

The history that I have inherited is one in which my particularities—white, male, heterosexual—have continually cancelled out the particularities of others, because mine were claiming to be "universal." A story of progress has been, and continues to be, told to justify this domination. At the same time, striving for this abstract "universal" within the current hegemonic story does threaten to cancel out elements of my particularity as well, even though they are privileged. The global economic system of commodity exchange threatens the continued existence of the small Canadian landholder. As farms become larger due to technological "advances" and fewer people are required to produce the commodities the market requires, small towns either disappear or become larger centres. A particular community way of life ceases to exist. Why does this matter in light of global epidemics of poverty, disease, crime, terror, and war? The answer is that these issues are part of the same story, and that resistance is to be found in the potential for a connection between a defence of one's own particularities and a defence of the particularities of others. Angus explains that "the definition of this concept of particularity requires that one take a 'step back' with regard to one's everyday involvements in a collective identity in order to recognize that it *is* endangered, that it *should* be preserved and extended, and that this project requires that such a right be extended to *others* as well" (*(Dis-)Figurations* 84). This disrupts the logic by which certain particularities claim to be universal and all other particularities must be sacrificed to "get ahead," to "succeed," to "progress." In a province dominated, on the one hand, by social conservatism and, on the other, by neo-liberal market forces, the persistence of other stories here creates the potential for a defence of particularity that can be extended toward a global critique in a universalizing move.

Chapter One sets out the critical methodology and theoretical framework for this argument. It attempts to bring contemporary theorizations of community into relation with the historical myth that has produced the Alberta of today. It sets out to answer why this is a worthwhile approach to studying the literature of this province, and, indeed, why studying literature is a necessary task at this point in history. I have placed no arbitrary limits on the types of critics or theorists to which I have recourse in undertaking this task. Any thought that I have encountered that seemed to illuminate these concerns was considered appropriate. In seeking answers to these questions in continental European philosophy as well as North American and Albertan thought in a perhaps somewhat eclectic and idiosyncratic manner, I have been attempting to think these questions with as much rigor as I am able and to guard against the accusations of parochialism often leveled at those who defend regional particularity. Angus quotes George Grant as saying "[m]y study of Rousseau is a Canadian study" (qtd. in Angus, *Border* 232), which Angus interprets as a call to

> [t]ake up the task to think Canada, put your questions to the past and the future, and put them to the best thinkers. Without their help in bringing our national, binational, multinational, experience to philosophical articulation, we will remain a backwater and will deserve to do so. Argue with Rousseau; argue with Plato; through this dialogue we will make Canadian philosophy. (232)

I have attempted, in some small way, to heed this call by thinking my particularity through both the history of this place and the Western philosophic tradition.

The subsequent chapters read four "post-modern" Alberta novels against this theoretical base. While I believe that "literature" should be taken in Jean-Luc Nancy's broad sense, as that which "merely communicates [. . .] is nothing but communication itself, the passage from one to another, the sharing of one by the other" (*Inoperative* 65), the limits of this project require focus, and I have chosen to focus on the literary novel because it is the genre with which I feel most "at home." I have arranged these chapters chronologically by the novels' dates of publication; while this may suggest a teleology, a narrative of progress for Alberta literature, this was not the intent and the writing process was far from linear. The chronological order was imagined, initially, as provisional, but no other order with a more than arbitrary rational has revealed itself to me so I have fallen back on convention. This may well be one of the many ways in which this project is complicit with the system it is trying to resist; if this is the case all I can do for the moment is point it out and implore the reader to think of alternate orders.

Each of the novels being read for this study has been called "post-modern" and fit that definition as they resist the totality of myth, where "myth" is understood in the sense of claiming to provide access to a pure origin. However, from the perspective of today, a moment now considered by many to be after "post-modernism," reading these novels can suggest more than resistance to an old story: they suggest another order, an/other order, which can be glimpsed at the limits of discourse. They suggest new possibilities for belonging: belonging that coexists with homelessness.

The texts address the Alberta prairie, but none of them is strictly limited to "Alberta" (as geographical, historical, political, textual construct), troubling, thereby, the idea of Alberta as self-enclosed space, the idea of provinces or regions as somehow "naturally" given entities. As Cheryl Lousley argues, "a place is not defined by borders and enclosures but by the social relations at a particular location and the relations between that location and other locations at a particular moment in time. It follows that the identity of places, like the social relations which compose them, are dynamic and unfixed, and thus always open for contestation" ("Home?" 321). Each of the novels considered in this study is engaged in this contestation, but, at the same time as they resist mythic claims to a completed and fixed identity, they remain complicit in certain ways.

Chapter Two investigates how *What the Crow Said* (1978) displaces myths of belonging based in technological domination over "nature" and "language." This occurs in an indeterminate Alberta/Saskatchewan prairie/parkland border region. The novel continually makes myth plural by exposing difference, revealing excess, and deferring closure. The representation of language as an element within the system like any other calls forth the deconstruction of the system: language, along with land and labour, produce the system, and cannot be reduced to an element within it. Representation requires a preceding act of interpretation from which to proceed. Angus writes that "[t]he human body and the body of the world continually overflows the system of representation" (*Border* 188); Kroetsch's text shows how language also continually generates an unmanageable excess. Further, the prosperity of the Municipal District of Bigknife is generated by capturing nature's excess, but this supposed control of nature is shown to be false when nature changes and escapes this control. Attempts at capturing excess in the novel, and it presents an excessively excessive world, lead to death.

Chapter Three considers how *Obasan* (1981) exposes the myth of national inclusiveness, racial equality, and multicultural unity. It exposes this myth by exploring the interplay of various types of silence, and shows how the demand to speak can be as oppressive as the demand to remain silent. *Obasan* succeeds in creating a space in which previously silenced Japanese Canadians can speak, but only by suggesting a commensurability between Japanese Canadians and other dominated groups. It uses the Anglo discourse of indigenous appropriation against itself to avoid being similarly abstracted and appropriated, but, in so doing, becomes complicit with that discourse. That is, the question arises as to whether the Japanese Canadian community, insofar as it is restored in the novel, is created "through others and for others" as Nancy would have it (*Inoperative* 15), or through others and for the self. Alberta, and Canada, become "this land that is like every land" (Kogawa 248), but this universality strives to maintain the particularity on which it is based. As we will see, complicity is recognized and questioned by the novel's conclusion, which resists the unified closure suggested by the end of Naomi's story and avoids the subjective desire for mastery, maintains a vulnerability to otherness.

Chapter Four examines how *Places Far From Ellesmere* (1990) resists the myth of gender equality. The text seeks to explore the discursive formation of memory and place and the unsolved murders that lie within (especially that of Tolstoy's eponymous heroine/victim Anna Karenin), by exposing the mythic exclusion of women from the world and the discourse that makes it. This exploration from patriarchal Alberta to egalitarian Ellesmere is performed through questioning home, belonging, possession, and escape, issues around which both geography and fiction cohere. However, the novel also suggests a new myth of individual self-sufficiency and colonial power that threatens to recreate the domination of the previous patriarchal myth (i.e. (white) women become new, or co-, colonizers, along with (white) men). As in *Obasan*, the claim to a space of pure belonging threatens to mystify the simultaneous homelessness and thus repeat the structure of the dominant myth in which one community completes itself by appropriating the space of the other. However, (also like *Obasan*) the novel ends with a deferral, an opening out rather than a closing down, which acknowledges the text's complicity with myth and seeks to make myth plural. The potential for Ellesmere to provide a haven of absence for other women threatened by the murderers of language is limited by its history of patriarchal possession.

Chapter Five looks at how *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993) deconstructs the myth of the "Native" as natural—"Indians can run fast. Indians can endure pain. Indians have quick reflexes. Indians don't talk much. Indians have good eyesight. Indians have agile bodies. These are all Indian gifts" (King 393)—while providing a concrete basis for a Native community that opens out from the Blackfoot of southern Alberta to what King calls a "pan-Indian" identity. This is an identity that is universalizing to an extent, but maintains borders and silences to prevent its appropriation into a system of exchange (Eli does not tell Lionel why he came home; the Sun Dance ceremony is not described). The circular structure of the novel serves to highlight the text's instability, the incompletion of community, and the need for repetition. The need to tell the story over again, even at the novel's conclusion, emphasizes the striving towards completion, the process of telling a different story, that is never fully realized, and, thus, avoids becoming myth. It also, perhaps most significantly, presents an alternative view of history to the dominant teleological one in which humanity is progressing toward an end. It maintains traditions that precede the settler/invader view of history as progress undertaken through technological domination of nature.

These four novels, then, engage with the myths of particular places, and the larger global myths of nationalism and transnational capitalism that seek to represent those places back to their inhabitants as unified and homogenous. These texts make use of the specific history of the places they deal with to interrupt those myths and generate a silence that provides a space from which the other might speak. While each of these texts is, in a sense, "academic," and has been accepted, to a greater or lesser degree, into the "canon" of Canadian Literature, part of the challenge of criticism is to maintain the difference of texts by seeing them anew despite how dominant models construct "values of homogeneity and transcendence" (Brydon, "Myths" 8) and appropriate literary difference. *Belonging and Homelessness* locates itself within a number of existing debates—theoretical, literary, philosophical, etc.—and tries to show how the texts studied exceed existing models of explanation. No doubt in attempting this I both construct a new model and remain complicit with preceding models so as to appropriate difference for my own ends. However, the only alternative to such complicity is to remain silent and passively accept the dominant models. While recognizing complicity and speaking anyway is an uncomfortable and difficult position to be in, I am motivated by Angus' enjoinder: "English Canadian intellectuals must face the difficult tasks involved in speaking out of the academic division of labour to a general audience if our future is to take on any clear definition. The sense of one's own inadequacy is no excuse" (*Border* 207). Despite my inadequacy for the task attempted here, I have undertaken it with the faith that whatever forms my complicity may take the reader will continue the process I have tried to start (which is itself a continuation and extension of the work of previous thinkers).

Chapter One: Belonging and Homelessness in 'Post-Modern' Alberta Literature: Community at the Limits of Discourse

> Perhaps we shouldn't be displeased with the "environmental ethics" we have or the "business ethics" or the "political ethics" or any of the myriad of other codes of conduct suggested by our actions. After all, we've created them. We've created the stories that allow them to exist and flourish. They didn't come out of nowhere. They didn't arrive from another planet.
>
> *Want a different ethic? Tell a different story.*
>
> —*Thomas King,* The Truth About Stories (2003)

> In human life there must always be place for love of the good and love of one's own. Love of the good is man's [sic] highest end, but it is of the nature of things that we come to know and to love what is good by first meeting it in that which is our own—this particular body, this family, these friends, this woman, this part of the world, this set of traditions, this country, this civilization.
>
> —*George Grant*, Technology and Empire (1969)

In 1999 Taiwan Sugar Corporation (TSC) sought and received regulatory approval from the Alberta government for a 154,000 hog farrow-to-finish facility to be built in the County of Forty Mile near Lethbridge, Alberta. Local "community" interests, organized by Lisa Bechthold and Carol Hougen, were able to defeat the project both there and subsequently in Flagstaff County, south of Edmonton. Both TSC and local residents claimed to be acting in everyone's best interests. This conflict provides an example of how different stories can claim to offer a way towards "the good" in the name of "community." However, foundational assumptions about the nature of "community" as an object, shared by both sides, prevented this event from becoming a catalyst for the telling of a different story around a new concept of belonging. Nevertheless, this moment, in retrospect, does offer potential for rethinking what community means here, now. In that rethinking, there is potential for the discovery of a place that is justifiably our[2] own and from which a new story might arise.

There is an Alberta story of belonging. It is our story, and it is through this story that we come to know and to love what is good. It is the story of progress, of technological development, of scientific advancement, and it has provided a great many people, here, with something like freedom from dependency, something like a home. It starts with a mythic tale of settlement similar to the version recorded by Pierre Berton in *The Promised Land*:

> *None will ever forget these first despairing moments on the limitless ocean of the prairie. This is home. This is where we must live. This hard turf on which we stand, as tough as human gristle, will be our building material. Before we can prosper, before we plant a single grain, we must attack it, break it, turn it over, rip it apart, and finally nurture the black soil beneath. This is the folk memory of the West, the glue of prairie nationalism.* (151, original emphasis)

And it continues today in Fort McMurray with another kind of breaking, turning over, and ripping apart.

This method of home-making through work creates a problem for "our" story. In it "Alberta" is represented as a land without limits, with "no human associations" (Harrison ix), and "we" must impose "our" will on it to create those associations and achieve prosperity. To the extent this has been achieved, "we" have succeeded in being at home here. The residents of The County of Forty Mile and Flagstaff County are at home, insofar as they are at home, because of this story. The investment offered by Taiwan Sugar, on the other hand, suggests the potential for increased prosperity, for a more thorough and complete belonging; it suggests that "home" is still "on the way."

At the same time, this story of home-building both displaces and denies a preceding story of belonging here. While the focus of the story of settler/invader belonging tends to be on the period of mass immigration, 1896-1914 in Berton's account, this focus neatly minimizes more than two hundred years of previous impact by Europeans through the fur trade. The decimation of the buffalo economy, the forcing of Natives to settle on reservations, and the commodification of the land—through the government's purchase from the Hudson's Bay Company and striation through survey—served to prepare the way for widespread European settlement. This history both enables and is hidden in Berton's mythic version of settlement: the family confronting empty space and building a home where none had been before. Such a mythic story easily becomes one of individual heroic triumph both over nature and over other stories of belonging.

Today, Alberta remains a "promised land" for people in other parts of this country and other parts of the world, but belonging here is more divorced than ever before from a recognition of human dependency on that which is not of our making. The story of belonging through domination remains hegemonic. This, I will argue, results from a tendency to tell the story of the successes of "our" "attack" on nature, and the promises of future successes that this narrative contains, and to cover over the initial moment of despair and the traces of homelessness which persist. In the County of Forty Mile the Taiwan Sugar dispute was structured around an opposition between those who would defend the "community" that already exists and those who would make things better for the "community" through the increasing prosperity promised by technological development and progress. On one hand there is Lisa Bechthold telling "her neighbors, all sunburnt grain farmers, that many US states had restricted or banned big corporate hog operations because of air and water pollution" and asking "[i]s our community setting itself up to become a glorified landfill?" (Nikiforuk). On the other, there is Alberta Pork Producers Development Corporation claiming, on their website, "larger-scale production has also resulted in the adoption of better agricultural practices as technologies become available to lessen the impact on the environment and surrounding communities" and, more generally, "Alberta has approximately 1,000 active pork producers and each of those operations makes a significant contribution to the local community, both by creating employment opportunities, and by purchasing goods and services from numerous local providers." The dispute was between a defence, on the one hand, of "homes" understood as particular, local, and established and an argument for "home" as the universal potential for a global community of cosmopolitan citizens. However, for both it is a problem of storytelling, a problem of telling the story of humans as separate from and independent of nature and each other, of humans as capable of creating a world oriented toward our own ends.

Both of these stories are founded in the modern belief in progress. Insofar as *Belonging and Homelessness* seeks to interrupt this story, it is critical of this belief. However, when engaging in such criticism we must, I believe, remember George Grant's injunction that

> [m]odern human beings since their beginnings have been moved by the faith that the mastery of nature would lead to the overcoming of hunger and labour, disease and war on so widespread a scale that at last we could build the world-wide

> society of free and equal people. One must never think about technological destiny without looking squarely at the justice in those hopes. (*Justice* 15)

This story of modernity as mastery remains the dominant story of Alberta and the story within which the belonging of settlers has been created. It is a modern story that sits within a global context. The dominance of this story means that establishing a "different ethic" by telling King's "different story" is not an easy task. It is important to note at the outset that King's perspective as a Native North American of mixed race is profoundly different than George Grant's: the particularities of each give them different access to the universal. However, the desire to "build the world-wide society of free and equal people" that Grant critiques is also the motive behind the story that King shows effacing and marginalizing Native traditions in North American. To perform this task of telling a different story in such a way that it does not become mere parochialism, one must face the challenge to tell a different story that does not lose the justness of the global hopes contained by the story it is displacing.

Within this story, which makes Alberta an abstract space capable of generating profit, a Taiwan Sugar executive can justify the company's expansion to Canada because "[m]ounting environmental concern and criticism in recent years has made it hard to raise hogs in Taiwan" and "Canada is such a huge country and we can easily find a place without residents nearby" (Aussie-Pork-Net). Satisfying the food needs of the people of Taiwan is a valid pursuit in Canada if we are to have a world-wide society of free and equal people.[3] "Community" in this universal sense is still "on the way" in this view. Alberta has an "excess" of land that can be put to use in exchange for an investment of capital by the Taiwanese.[4] However, this view of community comes into conflict with the understanding of "community" among the people of Forty Mile who believe they have achieved belonging such that the aims of universal modernity will cut off their particular access to the good they know in their current existence. This is a conservative view in that it seeks to conserve what is "good" in the current situation.

Even so, this "good" has arisen within liberal modernity, a story that has justified the sacrifice of other particular views of the good in the name of achieving the universal and homogenous state: indigenous peoples attempted to defend and preserve their systems of belonging following contact with Europeans, but the settler/invader narrative marginalized, minimized, and homogenized their stories in the name of "inevitable" progress. Now, when faced with further "inevitable" progress, resistance to increasing liberalization is faced with the problems of contingency and relativism.[5] Why here? Why now? Why is this worth preserving and not that? Nevertheless, *Belonging and Homelessness* argues that telling a different story must maintain the good of the current story even though it failed to do so when it displaced the preceding one. We need a story that allows for rational justification of the particular that is not fundamentalism.

King is right that we have reason to be dissatisfied with the "ethics" of our time. This dissatisfaction with modernity and the struggle to maintain the justice of its aims is a characteristic shared by the novels studied in *Belonging and Homelessness*. The problem of the story of progressive belonging for newcomers in Alberta is something that the literature of the region and the nation has struggled with since its beginnings. Working within a larger discourse of progress, various stories have been told, but they ended up being different versions of the same story, modernity's promise of freedom, a promise that, while claiming to be universal, served the particular interests of those in power and replaced preceding indigenous and natural orders with a scientific-rational one. The exclusivity of this order, its universality, is what the novels studied here call into question. But before considering how this questioning resists "progress," we need an understanding of how this order came to be and how it came to be dominant here.

The Capitalist System and Progress

The history of a belief in progress is far too long and complicated to be done justice here, or, indeed, by me. I can offer only an abbreviated version, relying on the work of others that is appropriate to the concerns of *Belonging and Homelessness*. I follow Angus in locating a crucial moment for this history "in the late Renaissance" when it became possible to conceive of the world "as standing apart from a subject who represents the world cognitively to itself" (*Border* 187). While this "inauguration of the epoch of the modern world" (187), of course, has its origins ever-earlier in history,[6] the system of rational scientific and technological representation, of which liberal capitalism has been the most enduring form, that took shape following this moment, has had profound global impact and remains foundational for whatever degree of belonging has been achieved by settler/invaders in Alberta. As George Grant asserts, "North Americans have no history before the age of progress" (*Philosophy* 22).[7] The abstraction of the subject from the world claims the possibility of an objective understanding of the world beyond our particular human limitations: it denies the basis for understanding, for perception, both in our bodies and in our relationships with others in a particular place; it suggests that "the subject" can represent "the world" to itself in the same way regardless of where and who it is.

However, Gayatri Spivak has shown that even Immanuel Kant, the philosopher who made rational subjectivity the primary focus for an understanding of the world, was unable to make the subject autonomous. Kant writes, in *The Critique of Judgement,* that "without the development of moral ideas, that which, thanks to preparatory culture, we call sublime, merely strikes the untutored man as terrifying" (115). That is, it is only as a result of "preparatory culture" that the rational subject is able to explain those elements in the world which may seem terrifying.[8] It is only by placing the world within a particular story that the initial despair can be overcome. It is only as a result of "this family," "these friends," "this set of traditions," and "this civilization" that the subject is able to represent the world to itself in a particular way that it knows as "good." The subject is not self-contained, self-sufficient, autonomous. And it is not objective, as it has been educated within a particular culture, has learned to explain the world with recourse to a particular story. It is only as a result of a subsequent rhetorical mystification that any particular knowledge can claim its own universality.

When a subject attempts to represent itself as autonomous it must mystify its relation to this preparatory culture, appropriate it into itself or deny its existence. That is, to claim autonomy, one cannot be seen to be dependent on anything: attempts to represent the subject as self-enclosed will, necessarily, fail. The cognitive subject does not even control the processes of its own body. The idea of the autonomous subject is connected to the idea of a rational, self-enclosed system of commodity exchange. Angus argues that

> it is necessary to gather together an understanding of the capitalist "system" with modern scientific "representation" into a single concept, since both of these are

> important to the set of contemporary issues that can be designated as ecological. Here the key issue is the emergence of the very notion of a self-enclosed and self-regulating system. This notion of a system occurs both in the modern representation of the world as an object of knowledge and in the economic representation of all factors of production—especially land and labour—as designated by exchange equivalents such that unity arises from the equalization or homogenization, of parts rather than through the coordination of concrete diversity. (*Border* 187)

Still, homogenization does not succeed in making land and labour into commodities like any other: "[t]he human body and the body of the world continually overflow the system of representation" (Angus, *Border* 188). Because land and labour are productive origins, responsible for producing all other commodities, they are not simply commodities and will always, at least partially, escape representations as such: they generate excess that is not profitable. Like the dependence of the subject on the community that surrounds and creates it, the system of commodity exchange depends on the world in which it comes into being. Land and labour produce excess that is not profitable in addition to that which is. The system is not closed. This notion of excess undoes both the scientific representation of the world as objectively knowable and the capitalist system of commodity exchange. In Alberta, the scientific understanding of systems is fundamental to the story of belonging that has become dominant here.

It must suffice to simply assert that the capitalism of the fur trading Hudson's Bay and North West Companies, which is one beginning for the reorganization of indigenous systems of belonging that precedes "our own," is not the same as that of

Syncrude or Monsanto, companies that are reorganizing the current system of belonging. Yet similarities do exist, and a crucial one for *Belonging and Homelessness* is the concept of the "yield." Angus explains that "[t]he capitalist system can be defined as 'capitalist' and as a 'system' because that which is really productive [land and labour] itself is treated as a factor of production that is 'in principle' like any other factor, made comparable through money equivalents" (*Border* 186). This is how capitalism attempts to incorporate its excess and points to the strategy of totalizing systems more generally: that which is productive within the system, that on which it is founded, is treated as if it is an element within the system. Angus explains: "*[t]he very idea of a system consists in turning the productive origin inside and representing it as simply another factor within the system*" (*Border* 188). This excess, that is the origin of systems, is partially captured within systems as a profitable yield. Furs, oil, and canola seed have all been profitable in this way; so has the human labour necessary for extracting these commodities. However, the process of capturing these yields does not, and cannot, account for all of the excess. Angus says, "[h]uman domestication of the excess that defines the wild shapes the wild order into a humanly convenient one, reduces diversity, and takes the excess for itself" (*Border* 197). But, while "[e]xcess keeps the system going" it "finds no recognition within it, only the belated and diluted recognition of a yield" (197). It is not recognized as an origin, simply as one commodity among many. Science continually seeks uses for the "byproducts" of production, but there continues to be "waste."

In large part the success of the resistance to TSC's proposed pork operation was the result of its ability to convince local government that the proposal did not satisfactorily account for the "waste" the facility would produce.[9] While it is conventional logic that animal waste is useful as fertilizer, there is a limit to the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus the land can absorb. Beyond this limit it becomes pollution, endangering the land's ability to support production. Pollution refuses to yield benefits to the system and becomes dangerous "excess." This argument was successful for the residents of the County of Forty Mile and Flagstaff County; in spite of this, such resistance continues to operate within the logic of modernity. Profits, prosperity, and "quality of life" are endangered by an uncommodifiable excess. Therefore, the current system, which more perfectly commodifies the excess of the area, should be permitted to continue.

The sense of "yield" as "produce or provide (a natural, agricultural, or industrial product)" is inextricably linked to its meanings of, "give way to demands or pressure; submit" (yield). Land and labour are made to submit to the system to produce commodities that are profitable within the system. However, this submission is never complete, as the productivity is never entirely profitable. The unyielding excess is ignored and marginalized by the system: if it cannot be a commodity, it cannot exist because its existence would prove that the system is not self-enclosed. The revelation of the impossibility of such enclosure for Taiwan Sugar's operation led to its defeat. A more radical deconstruction suggests that capitalism, and systems in general, always fail to achieve such closure. This failure is revealed in language.

The Productivity of Language

Like land and labour, language is productive. Capitalism claims to be self-enclosed and mystifies, through representation, the fact that its foundations precede and exceed it: it uses rhetoric to represent itself as natural, total, and ahistorical, thereby revealing a dependence on language even in its claim to be independent. It needs rhetoric; it needs to persuade that it is self-founding and natural. Capitalism seeks to capture the productivity of language as a yield by buying and selling stories as commodities. While it is able to do this to an extent, and is, therefore, "parasitic" (Angus, *Border* 188) on the productivity of language, the proliferation of meaning creates an excess that the system is unable to completely contain. Systems can make language submit and yield the meanings they want, to contain the excess, but these are not the only meanings language will produce.

When Carol Hougen and Lisa Bechthold attempted to table their petition against Taiwan Sugar's plan, the chairman of the county planning commission said, "[w]e only want to deal with the facts" (Nikiforuk), suggesting that public opinion was not a "fact" and that the only legitimate factors to be considered were 'scientific' and 'objective.' Hougen, though, maintained, "[t]hese are the facts. We have 704 people opposed to this" (Nikiforuk). This response refuses to allow the signification of the word 'facts' to be limited, to yield only the meaning that is productive and useful for a particular group. Opening up the potential meaning of "facts" allows for other voices to be heard.

Systematic use of language can also be seen in attempts to make the word "community" yield a universal meaning in the service of particular interests. "Community" is a particularly important example because, as Raymond Williams shows, "unlike all other terms of social organization (*state, nation, society*, etc.) it [community] seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term" (76). This is indeed the case in the Taiwan Sugar dispute and the subsequent fall[illegible], as all sides, as we will see, sought to defend and promote their positions by invoking “community.” Everyone did what they did for the “community.”

Community At Work

Gerard Delanty begins his study of community by describing the ambivalence of the term: “[o]n the one side, it expresses locality and particularness—the domain of immediate social relations, the familiar, proximity—and, on the other, it refers to the universal community in which all human beings participate” (12). It has been the hope of modernity to connect these two sides of community. Etymologically, “community” has, according to Williams, the sense of, “the commons or common people, as distinguished from those of rank” (75) and the justice, as Grant has it, of the desire to establish global community is the justice of the desire on the part of the common people for a “free and equal society” that eliminates or overcomes the distinctions of rank. However, as Leo Strauss states, “there are politically relevant natural differences among men [sic] which cannot be abolished or neutralized” (211). The claims of liberal homogenous universality are in fact, like all other claims of universality, particularities in disguise. While both TSC and the residents of Forty Mile argued for “community,” they were advancing particular interests.

The problem with “community” as universal is that attempts to make it immanent, to make it manifest here on Earth, inevitably privilege certain particular forms of community over other equally valid ones. As Kenneth Burke argues, “[w]hen two men [sic] collaborate in an enterprise to which they contribute different kinds of services and from which they derive different amounts and kinds of profit, who is to say, once and for all, just where cooperation' ends and one partner's 'exploitation' of the other begins?" (25). In Alberta we can see this process of "exploitation" mystifying "cooperation," of particulars claiming to be universals, when Dennis Hodgkinson, president of DGH Engineering, the firm contracted by Taiwan Sugar to build the project in Forty Mile, "said it would save grain farmers transportation costs and stimulate at least $30 million in economic activity in the area" (Nikiforuk). While this may well have been a true statement, the bias on the part of Hodgkinson makes it impossible to determine where a desire to cooperate with residents ends and a desire to profit off their land and labour begins. To understand this process of mystification around "community" we need to understand where this story of community came from.

During the Enlightenment, the rational subject capable of representing the world objectively became the focal point for a recovery of community as humanity's goal: by the objective observation of the scientific method, it was thought, "humanity" could be understood, the unifying essence distilled, and universal harmony instituted. Nonetheless, the communal stories that arose as a result have failed as a means of accessing the good by becoming systematic, creating fundamental limits that support particular relations of power in the name of universality, thereby closing rather than opening a passage to the good: they impose their particulars as universals. This is clear in the construction of the rational subject itself, as the illusion of objectivity is achieved when, "the knowing subject has been subtracted from participation in the world" (Angus, *Border* 187). Delanty argues that from the seventeenth century onwards, "[t]he defining element in the discourse of community [...] was a critique of the state, which in the age of Enlightenment was absolutist. In this respect community expressed a dream impossible to realize: a vision of pure or pristine social bond that did not need a state" (9). That is, it sought to recover an imaginary origin of pure social belonging, a "golden age" that preceded the necessary evil of the state, by completing the modern project. The Enlightenment and the ensuing pursuit of rationality in modernity promised to recover this origin at Hegel's "end of history."[10] However, such a state, even liberal democracy, can only be attained, and sustained, as an illusion in which concrete difference is abstracted and the foundations of the system of exchange are treated as though they were elements within the system like any other.

Community depends on "sharing something in common," but this sharing is never complete. Still, myths of community *represent* sharing as complete or suggest that it is the *fate* of a people that this sharing be completed, and, in fact, it is, necessarily, their *work* to complete it. Angus claims that "[c]ontemporary public discourse is blocked by both the tribalizing devolution of the politics of identity and the globalizing forces of corporate political economy. They erase commonality through a reduction to self-interest, consumerism, and the depressive adjustment to fate" (*Border* 6). Thus, when, for example, Benedict Anderson connects the rise of "the new communities" (42) of nations with print technology and capitalism, it is important to maintain his insight that this was an historical occurrence emerging from the *work* of specific forces and not the inevitable fate of historical *progress*. Similarly, the success or failure of transnational capital investments and corporate liberalization of trade rules is not inevitable. Warren Bechthold "thought no matter what the girls did, they couldn't beat TSC" (Nikiforuk), but was proven wrong by his spouse, Lisa, and those who, along with her, refused to accept the "fate" of living next to a pork factory. As Giorgio Agamben asserts,

> [t]he fact that must constitute the point of departure for any discourse on ethics is that there is no essence, no historical or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny that humans must enact or realize. This is the only reason why something like ethics can exist, because it is clear that if humans were or had to be this or that substance, this or that destiny, no ethical experience would be possible—there would be only tasks to be done. (43)

Further, this work, or series of tasks, depends on the telling of a particular story as its productive foundation, a story that attempts to install its particularity as universality, to structure its ends as inevitable, fated. Community has been, and continues to be, fertile ground for particularities claiming to be universals. However, while "community" can be used to support systems, it can also resist this use; indeed it necessarily resists the concept of "use."

Community Beyond Work

Jean-Luc Nancy, in *The Inoperative Community*,[11] seeks to "question[] the breakdown of community that supposedly engendered the modern era" (9). He, and other postmodern theorists of community, are no doubt right that this breakdown, normally located in the Enlightenment narrative repeated above, never happened except in stories: "at every moment in its history the Occident has given itself over to the nostalgia for a more archaic community that has disappeared, and to deploring a loss of familiarity, fraternity and conviviality" (Nancy 10). Or, as Gerard Delanty puts it, "[a]s a discourse of loss and recovery, community can be utopian and at the same time nostalgic" (11). Nonetheless, this nostalgia for the (imagined) pre-modern community, which the

Enlightenment and its legacy promise, in their justifying narratives, to restore at the "end of history," remains and continues to have material consequences in the world. Modernity's totalizing systems promise this familiarity in exchange for particular sacrifice to the system. The narrative of loss of origins/unity (and the potential for recovery) remains foundational for the western philosophical tradition. It continues to provide the justification for both a variety of fundamentalisms and increased liberalism. One promotes a return to pre-modern hierarchies, or claims to have achieved such a return and to be defending it against "outsiders." The other promises that pushing the work of modernity to its conclusion will culminate in universal belonging once any physical, emotional, or spiritual lack can be satisfied through consumption, or given a dollar equivalent.

In a specifically Canadian context, this tension is seen in the Red Tory tradition of thinkers such as George Grant, H.A. Innis, and Northrop Frye, who sought to establish a national narrative based on recovering a particular, separate, unity as a way of resisting the homogenization of the American Empire and its push for global market dominance. The Red Tories have represented, for Canadians, "[a] conservative hope—that one need not throw away the traditions, histories, and particularities of the past [. . .] [d]espite the overwhelming concessions to social uniformity and centralized administration presided over by continentalists who shared the main assumptions of American liberalism" (Angus, *Border* 76). This conservative hope is a motivating force behind *Belonging and Homelessness* and can be seen, in a now global context, among those citizens who resisted the Taiwan Sugar project. Yet insofar as Grant argued that "[a]n ethical society [...] is [...] entirely non-technological, even though this is impossible for a human society" and Innis that "[a] local time-bound, oral society [...] is assumed to be entirely non-spatial, which is similarly impossible," the Red Tory tradition offers only a "strategy of containment" because it does not "consider that industrial-technological society can ever really be surpassed" (Angus, *Border* 103). Thus its story offers only a lament, a kind of retreat and rear-guard defence of the particular, in the face of liberalism's promise of the universal through the sacrifice of the particular. As such, the defeat of the TSC proposal is a success, but the system of farming in Forty Mile and Flagstaff is only different in degree from that of TSC and "factory-farming." It continues to be determined by the demands of a spatial and technological global market that will continue to impinge on whatever non-technological, oral, time-bound belonging is currently in place. In this view, capitalism cannot be defeated and the past cannot be recovered; all we can do is defend and preserve what remains of our particularity as long as possible. Or, conversely, we can join the dominant trends of American liberalism (à la Marshall McLuhan). However, if we begin from the notion of an "unworked community," a beginning that is both the foundation of our belonging here and a revelation of homelessness, we can start to recognize a third option.

Nancy argues that to "unwork" community is a "task" that needs to be undertaken: it is necessary to "unwork" the destructive effects of modernity's communities, to undo the exclusions such communities have created to justify their myths of completion and which they have then used, circularly, to justify those exclusions. This unworking can be done by exposing the universalist myths on which communal exclusions are based. In Canada, the tradition of the Red Tory lament provides a place to start in its defence of Canada's particularity, even if that particularity is itself potentially oppressive and promotes a myth of national completion that also needs unworking. Similarly, the resistance to Taiwan Sugar was forced to operate within the discourse of liberalism, to make an argument based on "quality of life," "property values," and "rights" rather than one based on a radical notion of excess as resisting systematization.[12] The county's Municipal Planning Commission "unanimously squashed DGH's application, saying it 'would interfere with the use, enjoyment and value of neighboring properties,' as well as smelling up the place and maybe even contaminating surface- and groundwater" (Nikiforuk). It is worth starting with this kind of defence, though, despite the threat of parochialism, because it provides a model for justifying particularity against apparent universality that can be repeated to unwork communal completion in other contexts. The Red Tory tradition provides a logic for maintaining particularity; Nancy's deconstruction provides an understanding of community as uncommodifiable. Together, with Angus' insight on the role of the border, these thinkers enable us, now, to interrupt the narrative of progress, as it abstracts Alberta particularity and embodies itself in the communities that persist here.

It is the active sense of "unworked" that I would like to stress: in addition to the contemporary existence of a *community that is not working*, that has *failed to work* in the sense of not providing the *familiarity* it promised, there is a need to *perform the unworking of community* in an *absence of work*. That is, the promise of community will not be fulfilled from within the realm of work. As Delanty explains, "[i]n community the self finds its identity in a relationship with others. This view of community resists every attempt to pin it down in an institutional or spatial structure, since it is something that is only experienced. For this reason, too, community is 'inoperative'; it can never be instrumentalized or institutionalized" (136). In this sense, community will not yield for a system. It will not submit and it will not produce anything of value for the system. Therefore, while a settler might say with some justification that what built his farm is "all here. In these two arms. Tough. Strong. You betcha" (Broadfoot 58), community is neither built nor recovered through the imposition of human will. Similarly, "community" will not be determined by the building of hog barns, nor will it be determined by their absence. Thus, community proper, that which exists only between individuals and allows individuals to come into being, always precedes and exceeds capital's attempts to use it to embody itself. Community, then, resists homogenization, and provides a focus for groups seeking to define alternatives to capitalism.

Nevertheless, community is threatened by representations that contain it in the realm of work, despite the impossibility of the complete success of such a project: modernity's attempts to do this, and, thereby, complete the sharing that constitutes community, led to its tragic failures[13] and continue to create oppression, dehumanization, exploitation and commodification. In Alberta, the settler history, still much celebrated in local fairs, stampedes, rodeos, and so on, often fails to remember or acknowledge either the pre-existing communities that were displaced to make way for settlers' arrivals or the natural productivity that was domesticated and reoriented toward a yield by human labour to generate profits. The exploitation of the land as "community-building project" has not succeeded in delivering community as an object. The demands of the system—requiring expansion and the achievement of "community" as success, belonging, satisfaction—remain a receding horizon.

Working toward the completion of community posits its end—"a complete sharing implies the disappearance of what is shared" (Nancy, *Inoperative*35)—and while achieving such an end may be impossible—"[a]t bottom, it is impossible for us to lose community" (Nancy 35)—working toward it has destructive effects. We see these destructive effects in the histories of fascism, imperialism, o totalitarian dictatorships: "the concentration camp—and the extermination camp, the camp of exterminating concentration—is in essence the will to destroy community" (Nancy 35). While it may be possible for individuals working within a myth of fascism or imperialism (or modern liberalism or technological determinism) to believe that one's own particularity and that of others needs to be "sacrificed" to attain "the good," such sacrifice cuts one off from the good by cutting one off from the difference of others. In contrast, the incompletion of community opens a space for love among individuals:

> [l]ove does not *complete* community [...] in that case it would be its work, or it would put it to work. On the contrary, love [...] exposes the unworking and therefore the incessant *incompletion* of community. It exposes community *at its limit*. (Nancy, *Inoperative* 38)

Such a notion of limit opposes liberalism's goal of homogenous equality. Exposure *at* a limit is also exposure *of* a limit, and thus reveals that the modern representation of unity is false as there will always remain something that cannot be shared across a border, cannot be translated, cannot be abstracted. As Martin Heidegger has it, "[a] boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its presencing*" (154). Building a multi-million dollar hog barn in Alberta is not the same as building it in Taiwan or Idaho. These places are not simply abstract spaces waiting to embody capital.[14] Something begins at the border and creates difference. It is within this difference that belonging is achieved, even as the otherness that precedes and exceeds it exposes a continued homelessness. The Alberta border creates difference with that which is "not-Alberta" but this border is not fundamental, absolute, or natural. There is a natural order that does not recognize this border. Nevertheless, this border allows a certain particularity to begin its presencing.

The modern economy is based on the concept of flow, but people do not "flow" across borders as easily as commodities, data, or capital. Limits persist. Something begins at the border, a particularity, or set of particularities, is enabled by the border, and not all will cross—something is sacrificed in the crossing. Therefore, attempts to make people flow like commodities have resulted in horrible atrocities:

> [e]migration, forced or chosen, across national frontiers or from village to metropolis, is the quintessential experience of our time. That industrialization and capitalism would require such a transport of men [sic] on an unprecedented scale and with a new kind of violence was already prophesied by the opening of the slave trade in the sixteenth century. The Western Front in the First World War with its conscripted massed armies was a later confirmation of the same practice of tearing up, assembling, transporting and concentrating in a 'no-man's land.' Later, concentration camps, across the world, followed the logic of the same continuous practice. (Berger 55)

All of these "global" "transports of men" impacted Alberta—from the settlement of the formerly enslaved and their children in the Amber Valley and elsewhere (along with government attempts to deny them entry), to the conscription of settlers during WWI, and the internment and dispersal of Japanese Canadians during WWII. Prior to this, of course, the "settlement" of the prairies by people of European descent, an heterogeneous group, occurred as a response to social and economic factors; one goal of which was "to establish a new 'investment frontier'" (Friesen, *Prairies* 162) for Eastern Canada. Rather than letting community appear at the border between particularities, these projects attempted to control the form of its appearance and bring it to completion. The residents of Forty Mile are the descendants of this use of settlement as investment and operate within the story it established. The difference, then, of their belonging from that sought through the "investment opportunity" of TSC is really one of degree: both occur within a "modern" story. However, this degree is important as it provides a model for a further and more radical deconstruction of the modern project of belonging through domination. Admitting that there is a limit to humans' control over nature disrupts the belief in the possibility of the universal and homogenous state.

The deconstruction of modernity's understanding of community enables a positive re-evaluation of the *incompleteness* of contemporary community. Rather than suggesting that "[t]he one hope of recreating a center now is to make it the entire earth" and "[o]nly worldwide solidarity can transcend modern homelessness" (Berger 67), it is necessary to recognize that these very attempts to transcend homelessness have created the destructive attempts at unity criticized above. That is not to say that the success of community in resisting the abstract completion promised by the capitalist system is satisfactory, or, somehow, fatalistically, the best one can hope for.[15] Neither does it mean that pre-modern, local, time-bound communities are an ideal to be returned to. The residents of the County of Forty Mile who resisted the TSC proposal were defending their particularity, but this particularity can only be understood as "community" if that community is recognized as incomplete. The continued existence of community, and the concrete particularity that needs to be shared to generate community, is a hopeful starting point, a place, or the beginning of a place, from which a new story can be told, and which can be returned to when that story becomes old and commodified.

Why Literature?

To answer this question we should recall King's premise on which his injunction to "tell a different story" is based: "the truth about stories is that that's all *we* are" (2, emphasis added). It is important that the truth about stories is not "all that *I* am" or "all that *you* are" or "all that *they* are" or "all that *he/she* is." The truth is that stories create societies, citizens, communities, and systems. Stories bring concrete particularities, individual singularities, into contact, into relation, into being. However, this creation is always double and excessive. Stories orient people in the world, but they cannot perform this positioning without remainder. They exist on a continuum between literature and myth, with literature attempting to resist systematic closure and myth attempting to make it absolute. Despite our ability to deconstruct categories, "we" cannot do without, "we" cannot *be* without stories and the categories that they generate through the circulation of meaning.[16] The challenge for literature is to couple the deconstructive disruption of these categories with their re-creation in an iterative process that moves between the particular and the universal.[17] Performing this task depends on a specific understanding of stories' excess.

This brings us to the fraught relationship between literature and myth. While Nancy asks, "[i]s not myth the origin of literature, the origin of all literature and perhaps in a sense its sole content, its sole narrative [...]?" (*Inoperative* 63), he also claims that "literature's revelation, unlike myth's, does not reveal a completed reality" (*Inoperative* 63). This is a key, and a fine, distinction. Literature and myth bear a strong similarity; however, literature inscribes community's resistance to myth while myth prescribes the limits of community. That is to say that literature re-presents this resistance by allowing what is available, of community, to appear, while myth claims that what appears is all that there is of community, a universal. Myth founds a system while literature reveals what precedes and exceeds this foundation. Thus, representation that denies the resistance of community, its inapprehensible sharing of particularities, its excess, seeks to provide a totalizing myth, and this "'new' mythology essentially consists in the production of a speech that would unite, totalize, and thereby put (back) into the world the totality of words, discourses, and songs of a humanity in the process of reaching its fulfillment (or reaching its end)" (Nancy, *Inoperative* 51). This "production" seeks to end the productivity of language by eliminating myth's outside, appropriating its excess, and, thereby, eliminating the possibility of language generating new meanings. As Diana Brydon has it, "the principle of 'universality' —perhaps the dominant myth of the imperial mind—always works to repress any oppositional voice" ("Myths" 10). Myth generates false copies of community, simulacra, by claiming that community can be known, possessed, represented, when, in fact, community always escapes representation and resists possession.

While the resistance to TSC worked to expose the excess that persisted outside the engineering report's claims of closure—its failure to account for the actual land-base that would be required and the amount of water needed—it also functioned by defending an alternative myth of closure. As William J. Weida argues in the report he submitted on behalf of the opposition to TSC in Forty Mile, "[t]he assumption of a closed system is usually no more applicable to ILOs [Intensive Livestock Operations] than it is to any other industrial operation, but ILOs, masquerading as agricultural enterprises, have used the absence of laws governing agricultural pollution to avoid paying the costs of the waste generated by their operations." However, Weida's statement maintains the assumption that "traditional agriculture" can operate as a "closed system" that successfully deals with its own waste. Representing agriculture in this way is also a myth. While such a myth may have been necessary to counter the TSC proposal and preserve the particularity achieved by the residents of Forty Mile, literature goes further. It reveals the excess of all systems and refuses to claim closure.

Literature is necessary to the task of interrupting capitalism's systematic reproductions of communal simulacra, its myths, its representations that community has been, or can be, obtained as natural and permanent, that community is a category with fixed content. Literature is an important site of inquiry because it both performs and represents the sharing that constitutes community. However, since "[t]o invoke community is to immediately raise questions of belonging and power" (Joseph xxiii), representing the meeting of the self and the other that constitutes community cannot avoid complicity with work. Communal simulacra are produced through stories, or particular kinds of stories, stories at work: myths. Although language is productive, stories are, to a certain degree, closed once they have been told, and, certainly, once they have been published:[18] they submit to the reader and yield meaning. Still, the idea that stories are closed absolutely, and, therefore, known, once they are published is also a myth. Texts continue to change over time in both their material and linguistic significations. As time passes, pages yellow; typeface, design, and layout appear "antiquated"; readers add marginalia, "dog-ear" page corners, break spines; the meanings of words change; grammar and syntax alter: changes in context change the text and changes in the text change how it signifies.

Nevertheless, using language puts it to work, limits its potential meanings. Despite the proliferation of meanings in a text, not all meanings are possible.[19] Before speaking, anything may be said; before writing, anything may be written; but, inversely, there is no meaning at all unless it is communicated: "[t]he least signification just as much as the most elevated [...] has no meaning in itself and, as a result, is what it is and does what it does only insofar as it is communicated" (Nancy, *Being Singular* 2). The infinite potential of language is meaningless babble until it is circulated between sender and receiver. This creates a closed circuit of meaning. At the same time though, the closure involved in story-telling, the limitation, is never absolute, an excess remains, and part of the aim of criticism is to re-open stories by focusing on the excess that is unaccounted for in such a circuit (indeed, the closure of publication is itself an opening, a sharing; the story is not "finished" until it is read; it does not "mean" anything until it is communicated; as a "making public" publication enables the sharing of being, the sharing that constitutes being: being together). Criticism seeks to re-open, or keep open, stories, to allow them to circulate,[20] and "there is no other meaning than the meaning of circulation. But this circulation goes in all directions at once" (Nancy, *Being Singular* 3). That is to say that it is excessive. The relationship of literature to this excess is distinct from that of myth.

Capitalism, as a system, seeks a circulation that goes in only one direction, that of the yield, to capture excess as profit. As closed structures—commodities, printed books—stories move toward myth. That is, they are unable to circulate in all directions at once. They begin to circulate as marketing departments wish, thereby reducing the potential significations to be communicated. For stories, this means controlling how they are used. They become the purview of the classroom, the book club, "story-time," the airplane, the beach. In short, they are divorced from "the problems of everyday life" by being located in the realms of education and entertainment, even though stories structure everyday life. That is, the power of stories to resist the system of commodity exchange by pointing to and generating excess is limited by the marginalized status of stories as commodities to be bought and sold (novels, television shows, movies).

As Stephen Slemon has summarized the problem of literary/textual resistance, "resistance itself is [...] never *purely* resistance, never *simply* there in the text or the interpretive community, but is always *necessarily* complicit in the apparatus it seeks to transgress" ("Unsettling" 37). Complicity and resistance are linked. This does not mean, though, that resistance is futile, that stories' resistance is only ever complicity in disguise. The resistance to TSC by the residents of Forty Mile was complicit with the logic of the system they were working against but also managed to preserve something that was of more than contingent value. The interconnection of complicity and resistance highlights a difference between literature and myth. Only myth claims to be "pure" in any sense.

Stories that claim such purity are not "literature" in the sense I am using. Literature recognizes at least some of its complicity and calls attention to this as a means of enabling a kind of circulation that myth cannot deal with. Myth, if it recognizes its outside at all, does so only to disguise and mystify that recognition.

In terms of literature, the question of performing and representing the sharing of community in an ethical way, a way that allows for the multi-directional circulation of meaning, is central. As Spivak has shown, there is a danger in eliding the difference between, "representation as 'speaking for,' as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation,' as in art or philosophy" (256). Acts of re-presentation require and foreground the interpretation on which they are based, while acts of "speaking for" perform as invisible ventriloquists, mystifying the interpretation that precedes the speech, seeking the transparency, the naturalness, the closure, of myth. Representation speaks for communities, circulating their multiple and divergent meanings in one direction, homogenizing them. Re-presentation presents communities again, in new directions. However, this separation of the two senses of "representation" cannot be maintained; they continually merge and intertwine.

Literature, then, precisely because it faces the temptation of myth, also resists. By *performing* the sharing of community at the border between individuals, literature necessarily resists myth by re-presenting, presenting in a new way, foregrounding, its biases, the interpretation on which it is based. It, thereby, points to the excess that is beyond the system of capitalist exchange and is therefore, uncommodifiable. In *representing* this sharing as possessed within the text, literature is complicit with myth. The performance utilizes the productivity of language to point beyond language from our embodied positions within the system (it reveals that sharing occurs outside the text); the representation involves the mystification of power and hierarchies, it seeks to "speak for" its others.

In terms of identity stories can lead to either the myth of the "imagined community" of homogenous nations, regions, religions, and so on, or to a recognition of the process of community as exceeding definition, communities imagined as excess. As Nancy shows, "it is not that identity is always 'on the way,' projected on the horizon like a friendly star, like a value or a regulative idea. It never comes to be; it never identifies itself, even as an infinite project, *because it is already there*, because it is the *mélée*" (*Being Singular*155). If there is to be a communal narrative of identity that does not repeat the myth of fate, it must be continually contested, incomplete, caught in the mélée. This is not the story of community offered by proponents of the TSC proposal, nor is it the story of its critics. It is a story of the conflict, of community *as* the conflict.

The question then becomes, is it possible to tell a different story, this story of the mélée? Such a story would "allow to be said what no one, no subject, can say, and which exposes us in common" (Nancy, *Inoperative* 81). This story would be in-between the two points between which capitalism circulates, between abstract homogenization and concrete particularity, capital and community, value and embodiment, thereby disrupting its teleological circuit, preventing capital's proliferation by circulating in other directions. It would be a story that does not yield. The problem, though, is that literature relies on these same factors—the movement between particular and universal—as its means of performing community; it must yield meaning.

The difference is that literature, unlike myth, recognizes its limits while capitalism, the myth of capital, despite its reliance on community, claims to have none. It denies its outside, its dependency. Telling a different story, if it is to move beyond the myth of liberal capitalism's unified and self-sufficient subject, needs to occur at the limits of discourse. It is at the limits of discourse that literature can allow the outside of discourse to appear without seeking to appropriate it. That which is beyond discourse is, necessarily, silence.

Why Silence?

Silence is what is revealed at the limits of discourse. The novels that comprise this study are able to resist systematization insofar as they are able to reveal the limits of systematization by pointing toward silence. It is the persistence of this silence outside of discourse that maintains the potential for new stories to be told. Silence itself cannot be represented, but, by representing up to the limit, signification can allow us to peek over the border and glimpse silence. This peeking over the border is both a complicit and a resistant act. It makes silence yield to language, to submit to it, to produce meaning within the system set out by the story. It can, though, still resist this systematization by maintaining multiplicity in that meaning. Maintaining aspects of silence within discourse creates a moment that signifies in multiple directions at once.

Wilderness is productive within an order not oriented toward human ends, and, as such, is outside of possible human explanations, is confronted as silence. Yet, it needs to be explained within a human structure, a human story, if the relation between the human and the wild is to be understood, if it is not to remain wholly other. Drawing a border can serve this purpose, such that otherness is maintained within a structure of civilization that does not seek to contain it. That productive origin, the wild order, which systems attempt to appropriate and contain, can be approached in an ethic of respect that also allows a justification of particularity. Angus says,

> to the extent that I am drawn into a universalizing discourse justifying my own identity, then precisely to that extent I will be drawn out to recognize the identity of the Other. The Other remains Other, as I remain attached to my own in a manner distinct from the culture of Others. It cannot be a dialectic, and it cannot issue in an identity of feeling and reason. Thus it involves, necessarily, a tragic sense that something of what is essential to humanity will escape me. (*Border* 162)

This essence that escapes is the unrepresentable experience of community—"this is the very condition of experiencing the collective identity that defines human life" (*Border* 162)—and while it remains silent, it is approached, suggested, intimated, through literature.[21] Earlier Angus argues that

> [a]s one struggles to describe this site [the border], one reaches beyond the babble of plural speeches towards a universal place whose silence situates them all, that allows a naming which is the origin of language. This naming of place at the origin of language is the construction of silence, between murmur and babble, that situates the plurality of speeches in a unique gesture. Silent unique gesture builds place. From here a civilizing continuous with wilderness emerges. (*Border* 133)

The description of place, through literature, can answer community's exigency (to call attention to the excess that escapes appropriation by the myth of systems), but, at the same time, is in danger of becoming myth if it claims success as a "completed reality." It is only through "*silent* unique gesture" that place is built. If it is not silent, it is a continuation of the babble of wilderness, not the building of a home; if it is not unique, it is the building of a home that denies/destroys the wilderness by repeating the myth of human dominance over nature, by making it submit and produce a profitable meaning. However, that gesture will inevitably fail to represent the unifying silence, to tell the whole story, because it is not itself silence. In the Taiwan Sugar incident we can see this failure as the defence of the particular on the part of the residents of Forty Mile when an us/them logic crept into their rhetoric: "Bechthold and Hougen had decided to launch a national boycott of Taiwanese products if the TSC appeal was successful. 'Do you realize how many Taiwanese products are sold in Canada' asked Bechthold?" (Nikiforuk).

Nevertheless, as Maurice Blanchot notes, "Wittgenstein's all too famous and all too often repeated precept, 'Whereof one cannot speak, there one must be silent'—given that by enunciating it he has not been able to impose silence on himself—does indicate that in the final analysis one has to talk in order to remain silent" (56). Angus makes the same point: silence "is the discovery of a moment beyond language, though the beyond of language cannot be discovered outside language, but is that within language that allows its outside to appear" (*(Dis)figurations* 249). The limit between self and other, belonging and homelessness, civilization and wilderness, silence and discourse, is the site of literature. Insofar as this site is both division and connection, never presence, it escapes representation, does not yield. It is the inapprehensible sharing that is community. It can be experienced through representation, but not captured in it. This site is the universal that is approached through one's own and can only be pointed to by literature when it reaches beyond the babble toward silence and then returns in a circuit that generates plural meanings. While the example of TSC in Alberta is a useful starting point in the model for a defence of the particular that it provides, it does not take this next step, to suggest the silence that orients both sides in a universal relation, to reorient the story around an "us/we" relation rather than an "us/them" relation (Angus, *Border* 152). When this "us/we" relation becomes primary, then "[f]irst comes the universalizing postulate of equal worth; second, if necessary, the reluctant retreat based on the discovery of one's inability to accord it in a given case" (*Border* 162).

Since the description of this process occurs between particularity and universality, it escapes representation. As a result, literature must always begin again in its attempts to describe this site anew. This "site" is the limit of any and all aspects of "one's own," at which the particular meets that which is beyond it. As such, it could be investigated in terms of the body, race, class, gender, religion, nationality and so on. For the purposes of this study, the focus will be on the diverse forms of community that persist in "this part of the world" since, if, in the modern world, "space is understood as homogeneous and quantitative due to the abstraction from the qualitative differences of places," then "[a] recovery of the qualitative experience of place is thus part of a criticism of formal abstraction and of the ceding of practical life to scientific-technological imperatives that is characteristic of modernity" (Angus, "Locality" 21). The residents of Forty Mile, in the representations of the incident that I have read, fail to go beyond quantitative arguments about the impact of TSC on the space where they live, and, as such, fail to raise their criticism to the level of a critique against the "imperatives" that are "characteristic of modernity." Hougen, perhaps, comes closest when she summarizes the success of the struggle: "when people band together they can protect the lives of future generations" (Nikiforuk). However, this claim remains oriented to futurity and, as such, remains characteristic of modernity, suggesting that "community" remains "on the way."

If place were reduced to the abstract homogenous quantity of commodified space, the system would be closed and all places in the world would simply become spaces for the embodiment of capital. But, as Thomas Wharton shows in relation to representing "place," there is always some particular that exceeds representation:

> [i]n our attempt to render a landscape in words, we may be tripped up not only by the landscape itself, shifting and evading the names we give it, but also by the capricious recalcitrance of language itself. Not because writing the land is a mapping of uncharted territory, but because [. . .] it has been mapped many times already. And as these maps layer over one another, some small detail or larger feature always remains hidden. Or escapes, slides off the edge. And so another map must be drawn up. Our understanding of what is really 'out there' can never be complete. (310)

Unlike systems' repetition of movement between embodiment and abstraction, which is necessary to maintain the myth of completion and to generate a productive yield, literature needs to repeat its re-presentations as a counter-tendency, to allow its excess to appear as outside, to reveal its own incompleteness, to expose what is covered over when abstract space overwrites the particularities of place, suggesting that it is just another commodity.

At the same time that it is necessary to begin again, "[u]nless speech can stop, it is only the proliferation of sounds, or madness" (Angus, *(Dis)Figurations* 249). This stopping cannot become a universal myth (which would be the perpetual stasis sought by fundamentalism), since the excesses of land, labour, and language remain. As productive foundations, they are continually generative and prevent myth from becoming absolute. Any move toward the universal "calls forth its own deconstruction" (Angus, *(Dis)Figurations* 239), thereby falling back into the particular. It is within this interplay of universal and particular, silence and speech, that particularities (regions, traditions, histories, cultures, nationalities, genders, etc.) can be maintained and defended at the same time as the inequalities that particularities enable are questioned in a movement toward the universal[22]. While it is inevitable that differences persist, it is possible to maintain these differences without abandoning a concept of universality, without reverting to a merely parochial defence of one's own. Literature is a necessary means for performing such movement, and, thereby, interrupting myth. *Belonging and Homelessness* will look at the ways four particular novels generate this intervention by revealing the ways that various myths have mystified their excesses in Alberta. These novels interrupt the myths of "Alberta."

This critical intervention attempts to call attention to the interpretation involved in acts of representation, the ways language is made to yield, the propensity to generate political myths that deny/ignore community's resistance, its excess. However, this construction of silence is necessarily complicit. It makes the myth that attempts to overwrite resistance yield. It generates a pause and makes productive meaning out of that pause in a manner analogous to myth's capture of the productivity of the wilderness.

Community is the site between individuals, which allows individuals to come into being, and is represented (in both senses) in literature. While the site of community is not a geographical place, place is incorporated into myth as a means by which community is represented as completed. Communities are shown to "belong" in specific places, which are represented as existing before discourse; they become fixed; they yield.[23] Place is the connection of geography with discourse, by which geography becomes available to both myth and literature. As such, specific geographical places, and their histories, the maps that we have inherited of them, can be used, by literature, through its ability to re-present, to call attention to the excess, the silence, that has escaped previous representations, to interrupt myth and represent community as unfixed, unworked, incomplete. Place can be re-presented. Because of my particular connection, Alberta, with its history and myths, is the primary site of investigation for *Belonging and Homelessness* as I attempt to embrace the conflict within my own in a way that recognizes, without repeating, the exclusions of the past but also defends that particularity as part of the means available to me to access the good. Alberta is place, not merely abstract space.

Why Alberta?

There is a problem in writing about Alberta because of a tendency to treat it within either a regional (i.e. "prairie") or a national context which views the parts as microcosms/metonyms for the whole. By focusing on Alberta, I hope to disrupt that totalizing thinking. For this to happen, it is also necessary that the parts of Alberta not be understood as microcosms for an "Alberta identity." Each novel presents a collection of particular identifications that resist totalization. Alberta is a diverse place, and the novels studied here share a tendency to tell stories that recognize that diversity in the interplay between particularity and universality. In re-presenting this diversity, these novels are unworking the myth that posits individuals as essentially equivalent units comprising microcosmic parts of macrocosmic wholes.

Alison Calder and Robert Wardaugh explain how such a myth functions through representations of the prairie, arguing that the prairies become relegated to an historical, agrarian past where time no longer passes (4). Such temporal closure creates a hierarchical myth of the prairies that privileges the period of European-settler dominance by denying the preceding aboriginal experience and the subsequent increased immigration from non-European countries. In the words of one settler, used as the conclusion to Barry Broadfoot's *The Pioneer Years*, "[w]e were the first white people ever to go to that piece of land and I suppose it was like Columbus felt when he discovered America. No one before us. The whole country was ours" (403). This myth of the prairie needs to be rethought, its status as origin disrupted, as Columbus' discovery of the "new" world can no longer be understood as origin: both are beginnings,[24] and, as such, can be re-presented.

Alberta retains the "original" sense of "prairie" as caught in the history of settlement but also contradicts it by being simultaneously of the moment. As darling of the energy sector and friend of the Bush administration, Alberta is both "prairie" and not-prairie. Recent media representations of Alberta tend to focus on oil and gas wealth or rural life, occasionally recognizing the relationships between the two and rarely attempting to mediate the tensions between an idealized rural past and the promise of a cosmopolitan future. These two positions are most often constructed as opposed/contradictory, and such a binary is evident in the TSC incident as one side defends a "traditional" way of life and the other pushes forward "inevitable" globalization. Trading off this contradiction in representation continues to serve political and economic interests by generating an excess in the movement between "us" and "them" that can be re-incorporated as a yield. On one hand, we have the abstract, liberal, universalist belief in technological determinism that promises to restore a mythic community at the end of history; on the other, we have the particular, conservative, local belief in an historical community, remnants of which can be preserved by resisting technological progress. Both poles rely on a systematic domestication of excess, and the movement between these poles continues to justify their opposites.

Representations of the prairie continue to construct "a generalized prairie reality that is actually specific to a particular historical moment" (Calder and Wardaugh 6). This placing of a universal "prairie" in place of the ever-changing particular serves to offer up the "prairie" as given in the popular consciousness and dismiss or, at least, minimize differing conceptions of it. Market forces serve to facilitate such fixing, because, as Calder and Wardaugh note, for representations to "retain [their] value in the market, [they] must be identifiably 'prairie'" (10). Representations that are "identifiably" "prairie" enable market forces here: because the prairie is known and unchanging, increasing exploitation and domination of nature can pass relatively unnoticed: we can drill for oil and gas and coal-bed methane and strip-mine the tarsands with little regard for the environmental consequences because the Alberta "prairie" is unchanging and Stampede simulacra will perpetuate the "prairie" mythology every year. It is only, as in the TSC example, when people are able to make evident the threat of one view to the other that "market forces" can be resisted. However, this can too easily reinscribe the initial myth of settler/invader belonging.

Alberta is neither simply another "centre without margins" (McLuhan 2) in the global communications grid, nor nostalgic rural utopia. Literature calls attention to the complexity of the relationship. Calder and Wardaugh suggest that contemporary "prairie" writers "do not use historical sources naively [and] [t]he results are metafictional, metahistorical documents that interrogate their sources even as they reinscribe them" (9). The process of unworking the Alberta myth is not one of discarding the historical specificity of this place, but, rather, of maintaining it through questioning as a way of opening a space for new representations: it asks, given the history of this place, how can we be here responsibly?[25]

Alberta is the focal term in this analysis insofar as it provides a mid-level identification (between the solipsistically personal and the abstract notion of humanity as such, but which serves to allow the movement between each), that, in my estimation, cannot ignore the other aspects of "one's own": understandings of self, family, friends, nation, society, civilization all occur 'in place' even if that place is characterized more by movement and migration than stasis. The prairies were and continue to be a place of movement. As George Melnyk's *The Literary History of Alberta* shows, most stories published about Alberta for the first two hundred years after European contact were told by people, mostly men, who were born in Europe, visited for a short time, or never came to the place now called Alberta at all and knew it only through others' stories. Before "Alberta" existed as a geo-political entity, the movement of peoples through this territory was organized according to different principles. The focus on Alberta is not meant to privilege it over the other provinces of Canada or parts of the world except insofar as it has a particular connection to my own that other places do not. I arrive at Alberta because of a personal commitment to particularity as a requirement for disrupting myths. This particularity is “mine” because I inhabit an English-Canadian and settler/invader context. It attempts to respect other conceptions of place while maintaining the validity of my own conception as a way by which I access the good. Further, it is not meant to privilege place as a more essential element of “one’s own” than other elements—sex, gender, race, class, ethnicity, religion, and so on—except in recognizing that those elements exist in, and help to form, places. And places allow for the meeting and interaction of those elements as they move in and through palimpsestic spaces that are not neutral but bear the traces of their histories. The geographic space called Alberta only comes into being and continues to exist through the interaction of that space with the diverse particularities of its inhabitants. This is what I take Ian Adam to mean when he asserts that “place is space with a history.”

My focus on Alberta is meant to engage in, and embrace, the particular, personal, history of conflict, exploitation, and privilege of this place in a way that, hopefully, avoids mere solipsism and opens out towards a larger good. The history and the system that continues to dominate here both enable and conflict with this effort. As Arthur Kroker argues, “Canada is, and has always been, the most modern of the New World societies” due to “the character of its colonialism, of its domination of the land by technologies of communication, and of its imposition of an ‘abstract nation’ upon a divergent population by a fully technological polity” (83). Alberta has been constructed within the national myth of Canada, and the global myth of (neo-)liberal capitalism, as a site of wilderness that needs to be tamed, striated, and brought within the hierarchy of nation. "My own" exists within this narrative and my attempts to understand what is good within it and what is not is necessarily conflicted.

Sheila McManus examines one element of this conflict by explaining how both Canadian and U.S. American settlement policies were determined by a particular narrative. She shows how the Alberta/Montana borderlands were over-written by the federal governments of Canada and the United States to manage and mystify the contradictions inherent in their national myths regarding the indigenous inhabitants of the land. She argues that

> [r]egulating the spatial limits of aboriginal mobility was connected at an essential level with a desire to regulate every aspect of the social and racial boundaries between natives and whites. Each successive redrawing of the racial and spatial boundaries created the need for still more lines, even as the whole process became increasingly contradictory. After all, Canadian and American Indian officials shared the goal of eventually rendering such lines meaningless by assimilating 'Indians' so completely that they would eventually disappear as a group. (92)

While never completely achieved, this goal was sought[26] by telling a story of progress for Alberta as part of the nation that worked to mystify the contradictions within its logic (representing land, labour, and language as part of the system: the story, which fixed the roles of land and labour in place, and denied a place to Native inhabitants and other non-white, non-male others, attempted to achieve closure).

McManus shows, specifically, how the ideal of the (male, white) yeoman farmer was maintained in the policy of each government during the late 19th century despite the unsuitability of this system for Alberta's geography, environment, indigenous peoples, and settler populations.[27] This myth sought to impose a white male particularity as a universal in place of the diverse populations that preceded it. Along with indigenous inhabitants, other settlers were limited by this national myth as the governments sought to make all people into settlers, conforming to their ideal,[28] while at the same time limiting the opportunities for others to access the land by making it illegal for some to own land, attain citizenship, or even enter the country.[29] Alberta literature has both succumbed to complicity with this myth and resisted it, through interruption, by focusing on historical particularities that expose how the myth is constructed. Exploring this relationship between complicity and resistance in relation to specific novels is part of what *Belonging and Homelessness* attempts in the following chapters.

While McManus focuses on the similarities on either side of the 49th parallel, *Belonging and Homelessness* maintains that the international border between Canada and the United States, like all borders, allows difference to appear even though it is not "natural" or fundamental. While this border is in one sense arbitrary and contingent, it also, as Angus shows, shapes the process of self-identification.[30] My use of the term "prairies" rather than the more common U.S. American term "plains" provides a linguistic instance of this difference. Nevertheless, the process of settler/invader's building of a home on the Alberta prairies began within modernity's globalizing narrative. As a result, the primal experience of homelessness is always already mystified on both sides of the border.

The prairie myth declares that settlers overcame hostile nature and became indigenous. Therefore, the land has been subdued and now operates within the system of abstract exchange equivalents like any other element. However, the very term "prairies" reveals a hierarchy as it is often used within Canada to refer to three remarkably diverse provinces—Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta—all three of which are only partially “prairie” insofar as they “are grassy and [...] have low relief” (Hudson 271); they also contain parkland, boreal forest, and Canadian Shield (Hudson 269 and Map 16.3). This synecdochic conflation is continually perpetuated by the myth of the prairies and is even sustained by contradictory reminders of homelessness and wilderness: the prairies can simultaneously be represented as modern, progressive, technological heartland of capitalism as well as rugged, untamed, vast wilderness.[31] The latter representation provides the productive contradiction that serves to justify the expansion of the former into any remaining “untamed” locales (especially the north, which can be dismissed as not “prairie” anyway). The resistance to TSC succeeded partly by revealing the limits that already existed as a result of the settlement in Forty Mile. The TSC executive’s claim that “we can easily find a place without residents nearby” (Aussie-Pork-Net) was shown to be untrue. If the project had been located in northern Alberta, where claims to “emptiness” may still be perpetuated, it is hard to say what would have happened.[32]

Indeed, it is precisely this contradiction within Alberta’s mythic discourse that is interrupted by literature and exposed as an historical construct. At the same time, literature remains complicit with the dominant myth. For instance, by calling attention to the homelessness that underlies the mythic claims of belonging, literature can provide justification for further domination. Hence the worry of the young ranger in Kroetsch’s *Alberta* (1967), who is leaving Fort McMurray—“[i]t’s starting to feel like a *city* here”—for Fort Chipewyan. He warns, “[i]f you’re writing a book about Alberta don’t mention Chipewyan. That *is* Alberta” (280). The tragic irony is that less than forty years later, Fort

Chipewyan, on the shores of Lake Athabasca, suffers an astonishingly high rate of unusual cancers, with the most likely culprit being the polluted waters of the lake used for cooking, cleaning, and drinking. The water became polluted from either uranium mining in northern Saskatchewan, tar sands mining in northern Alberta, or both. Such destruction of the wilderness (and, thereby, ourselves) in attempts to make it yield is paradigmatic of Alberta. Literature can repeat modernity's call to build a home by simply calling attention to the spaces that it continues to define as wilderness. This is a problem for Alberta literature.

Why Not Indigeneity?

There is a tension within any identification with "home," and indeed within the concepts of identity and belonging, between the threat of a restrictive parochialism and the necessity for means of locating one's self in the world, one of which is an identification with a specific place. Roberto Maria Dainotto writes,

> I see regionalism as an attempt to revive some peculiarly nationalist ideals by passing them off as 'new' regionalist ones. After all, is regionalism really trying to liberate marginal cultures from the political impositions of nationalism? Or is it rather trying to imagine yet again a *Volkgeist* or 'Spirit of Place' whose boundaries protect a community from the political and cultural negotiations imposed by differences of 'economics, gender, race, creed?' (488).

Such a reading of regionalism sees it providing a site of identification that is fundamental and restrictive, a new last refuge for the scoundrel following the exposure of nationalism as hierarchical construct. This is certainly a danger in any "provincial" study, as we can see when Aritha van Herk claims, in *Mavericks*, that there is an "essential" Alberta character that can be traced back to the province's geological formation (16) infusing even "[t]he trilobites [who] were the first true Albertans, mobile and prolific" (17), or Kroetsch's ranger who believes the essence of "Alberta" is (always) further north. Similarly, Melnyk structures his literary history around writers' "contact with the physical and social landscape that is known to us today as Alberta" (I: xvi) and suggests that "Alberta has a literary history that is definable and worth knowing" (I: xx). While these different histories recognize some of their limits, they reveal a flaw in their treatment of Native peoples. Both Melnyk and van Herk recognize Natives as Alberta's First Peoples, but then proceed to incorporate them as origins for the story of Alberta, when, in fact, they expose "Alberta's" arbitrariness as a political construction imposed on a pre-existing world-view. A new story for Alberta requires an unworking of such restrictive views of provincial identity.

Melnyk is quite right that "[t]he myths of the colonializing [sic] groups that held sway in Alberta for the past one hundred and fifty years are still here, and in some sectors continue to be considered quintessentially Albertan; but in literature, their power is diminished and fading" (II: 230). While I agree with this statement, I cannot agree that the development of an egalitarian new story will occur through "a dialectical evolution from aboriginal to European to an emerging global consciousness" (I: 172), which will create the synthesis of "a *mythos*, a form or shape for the whole that unifies the project" (I: 172). We need to begin from an ethic of shared difference that avoids instrumentalizing the Aboriginal tradition to attempt to establish "an authentically indigenous Alberta expression beyond colonialism and imperialism" (I: 173) for non-

Aboriginal inhabitants. There is Indigenous expression and there is Alberta expression, and while the two can share certain elements, it is important that the differences are recognized and the two are not synthesized. This sharing must occur at a border that needs to be maintained. Alberta community, that which is performed and represented in Alberta literature, belongs here. In the arbitrary geo-political borders of a province of Canada, individuals experience the sharing of particularity that enables the saying of "we." Simultaneously, Alberta community does not belong, as those arbitrary borders enable a system that seeks to appropriate and deny the productivity that preceded their creation.

Although regionalism has been used to found myths, and, according to Dainotto, has become a site for the repetition of the ills of nationalism by suggesting a land-based unity and a preceding homogeneity that should be returned to, a focus on the regional level that recognizes the interplay of the particular and the universal can prevent such systematization. Dainotto writes,

> [p]lace *does* impose, then, 'boundaries of some sort' on our multicultural 'chaos of forms,' but such boundaries must necessarily be 'less firm' and more vague than geographical ones. Such places are not, in fact, real entities or geographical points, but rather 'ideal places,' hypotheses—commonplaces, in a word—from which we can begin to sanitize our present. (505)

Such is a succinct explanation of the danger of regionalism—it threatens to become an abstract ideal, a myth, a story claiming to be "natural" and complete. However, to abandon the particularity of regions, entirely, facilitates a larger, more powerful, myth of homogenization—global capitalism—which represents "power itself as dispersed, even deterritorialised, and democratically available to 'all' at the click of a mouse" (I. Findlay). Simply leveling the charge of parochialism at any attempt to defend particularity is too easy. In the Taiwan Sugar dispute Carol Hougen and Lisa Bechthold were accused of precisely this, and worse: "Bechthold received phone calls that accused her of starving Asian children, and hate mail that read: 'How does it feel to be the biggest racist in southern Alberta?'" (Nikiforuk). The defence of particularity over universality need not be a denial of universality as such, though. As Angus explains, this defence can be necessary to preserve "what I/we cannot accept and still be ourselves" (*Border* 162) and only returns to this particularity temporarily before returning to an us/we relation. Seeing Lisa Bechthold and Carol Hougen's resistance as based in racism or selfishness rather than on the necessary defence of a particular way of being in the world simply creates a binary opposition between these two stories.

It is always the case that "boundaries of some sort" are necessary as the means by which we, as humans, explain the world to ourselves, and this will necessarily have recourse to commonplaces, simplifications, abstractions, but this explanation needs to recognize the particular, hierarchical, embodiments of power that it seeks to deny.[33] While myth claims to have no boundaries and be founded in a pre-discursive past, something called "Alberta" does exist and it has geographical and historical and other kinds of particularity that can be suggested, if not captured, in discourse. It is a "real entity" just as much as any other category by which we might begin to explain the world to ourselves. We can begin there, recognizing at the same time that when we enter the realm of representation we will be moving away from those particularities because we are speaking as subjects within discourse, not objective entities outside it. "Alberta" then should be understood here to signify a contested and constructed intersection of the various aspects of "one's own" that enables us to say "we."

This "we" needs to be between myths of region, nation, and "global village," and, as such, needs to start from particularity. The particularity of Alberta is central to the founding myth of Canada, and, thus, it is central to a myth that can never provide a home as "center of the world" (Berger 56) for non-indigenous inhabitants. McManus notes that "[a]lthough 'heartlands' are often assumed to be the source of a nation's identity, the place where common values and beliefs are either forged or preserved, nations are in fact made and unmade at their borders" (xi).[34] Alberta, once part of the "uninhabited" wilderness other to central Canada, was exploited, sold, and given away to build the nation while simultaneously being represented as within the nation. As Gerald Friesen notes, "[t]he fertile lands of the western interior were intended to attract immigrants, it is true, but they were also used to pay for railways, schools, swamp drainage, military service, and the extinguishing of Indian title and the Hudson's Bay Company charter" (*Canadian Prairies* 184). The making of Canada as a nation "from sea to sea" was paid for through the sale of prairie lands. The territory of Rupert's Land was purchased from the Hudson's Bay Company for $1.5 million, 50,000 acres of land around their forts and approximately 6.6 million acres in the "fertile belt" (Friesen, *Prairies* 184). Similarly, the railway was financed by exchanging prairie land (25 million acres) for capital ($25,000,000) (Friesen 177). The commodification of the land, and the primacy of transnational capital, began even before the era of mass immigration brought about by the completion of the railway.[35] As Friesen notes, the CPR "was also a multinational enterprise: only about one-sixth of the stock was held in Canada during the next half-century, while majority ownership slowly shifted from American to British hands" (176). A view of the land as a commodity within the interconnected system of nationalism and (global) capitalism preceded European immigration and settlement. Through this process the system sought to eliminate or appropriate indigenous alternatives to the myth of capitalist progress and the nation's proprietary role in imposing that myth.

The historical process of commodification, exploitation, and exclusion in Alberta was mystified through the propagation of a particular story of this place, its myth, a myth that denied the difference of Native particularity. In Alberta the myth of settlement promised freedom with "free" land, "equality" of opportunity, inclusiveness, and the success of communal belonging as the reward for hard work. Berton describes how Patrick Burns, the Calgary livestock magnate, "became a Western icon, the symbol of a nation within a nation" because his success epitomized a place where, "it was devoutly believed, any man could rise to the top from the humblest beginnings if he had faith in the country and was prepared for hard work" (263). The communities that arose did so, as a result, within this myth and the realm of work, and, as such, brought about increasing homogenization. An understanding of history is necessary to prevent the continuation of such myth, to tell a different story.

Roland Barthes writes, "[t]he status of the bourgeoisie is particular, historical: man as represented by it is universal, eternal" (141). That is to say that myth serves to "prove" belonging, to create the "naturalness" of the system of dominance by representing its outsides (land, labour, and language) as inside. TSC was defeated because it was shown to be unable to operate within the region as a closed system; the system that was there claimed to belong; while such defence of particularity is important, the closure that enabled it needs to be unworked as well. Friesen argues, in *Citizens and Nation*, that "today's Canada offers little evidence of the economic principles they [First Nations] developed" (19). He notes how

> the capitalist system of economic organization soon extended around the world. Aboriginal people were swept into this global economic revolution. In the process, land and labour themselves became commodities. And other means of production, including many aspects of knowledge, increasingly were converted into property and privatized. (*Citizens* 25)

Since the indigenous alternative is not to be found in the economic realm, Friesen turns to culture: he maintains that First Nations continue to offer an alternative method of cultural reproduction that is both "fundamental to the growth of Canadian institutions" (11) and fundamentally different from those of settler/invaders. Former Calgary mayor Rod Sykes claims, "all Canadians, whether Native or European in origin, were 'immigrants.' The only difference [...] was the date on their tickets" (Friesen 18). However, Friesen shows that "[t]he difference between a history of three or four hundred years and a past of twelve thousand (or twenty or forty thousand) years is not just a matter of degree" (18). He argues, at the same time, that "all Canadians should understand the elements of a common narrative embracing both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians" (12) and sets out to provide examples of such a narrative. Such a narrative could easily become myth by suggesting that commonness is all there is, by commodifying Aboriginal stories in the same way that land and labour were, but, he concludes, "history is not a single, unalterable, and uncontested tale" (226). That is, history is not myth; difference persists. The story of history needs to repeat itself if it is to reveal the common without denying the difference that enables it. We need to recognize the sharing that occurred and occurs between Native and non-Native inhabitants of this place to create what exists now—its strengths and weaknesses—and that this sharing occurs between differences that are more than a matter of degree.

The question of establishing indigeneity through narrative has been taken up by literary critics of the prairies. Dick Harrison, in his landmark study of prairie fiction, *Unnamed Country*, takes his title from a passage in Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John*, but misses the irony of the original and undertakes the process of turning literature into myth. O'Hagan writes,

> a country where no man has stepped before is new in the real sense of the word, as though it had just been made, and when you turn your back upon it you feel that it may drop back again into the dusk that gave it being. It is only your vision that holds it in the known and created world. It is physically exhausting to look on unnamed country. A name is the magic to keep it within the horizons. Put a name to it, put it on a map, and you've got it. (80)

This is the beginning of a chapter entitled "Hearsay," and, as such, raises questions of bias from the outset. It is part of a tale told by Jack Denham, a remittance man who, "had lived in the midst of events. Yet they had somehow passed him by" (76). His claim to be "where no man has stepped" is quickly subverted by his encounter with Tay John. Harrison claims that "[t]he imagination is always more at home with what has already been rendered imaginatively" (7) and sets out to show how the creation of a canon of prairie literature is a "home-making" project. However, the claim that "like all unsettled territory it had no human associations, no ghosts, none of the significance imagination gives to the expressionless face of the earth after men have lived and died there" (Harrison ix) explicitly ignores the preceding inhabitants' experiences and their conflict with settlers, which O'Hagan represents (again in both senses).

On one hand, Harrison is right, in Kermode's sense, that we require the kinds of limits provided by stories to be at home, but, on the other, the deconstructive impulse is necessary as well. This home has not arisen in a vacuum, and the experience of homelessness persists alongside it. Melnyk, while recognizing the aboriginal past, similarly suggests that writers born to settlers in Alberta were able to synthesize the Aboriginal tradition with their European heritage and create, "an indigenous writing voice" (I:109). Deborah Keahey also argues that "home" is made on the prairies through story-telling: place is "a creation of the social, psychological, and cultural relationships that people have to particular landscapes or physical spaces" (7). While this is quite true, the plurality suggested in her study implies that all inhabitants, aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike, have equal access to the home-making power of stories, and the homelessness that underlies these attempts. "Home," though, is only achieved as a myth.

None of these views of belonging on the prairies in and through literature adequately account for Terry Goldie's point, in *Fear and Temptation: the Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*, that the nature of Canadians' presence in Canada is self-contradictory: "[t]he white Canadian looks at the Indian. The Indian is Other and therefore alien. But the Indian is indigenous and therefore cannot be alien. So the Canadian must be alien. But how can the Canadian be alien within Canada?" (12). To deal with this paradox, the Canadian develops discursive strategies that seek both to appropriate the Indian (the temptation of Goldie's title) and eradicate him or her (the fear) as a way of becoming indigenous. It is "through the indigene [that] the white character gains soul and the potential to become of the land" (Goldie 16). Harrison's "eastern eyes" become "indigenous" through a process of exploitation (of the land and its inhabitants) and justify that exploitation in literature: the pioneer imagination met the challenge of the new land, Harrison argues, "by surveying, fencing, building—anything to capture the new space within a known order" (x). That is, they attempted to explain the world through work. Further, he notes, "the Canadian Indian virtually disappeared from prairie fiction around the turn of the century and has not reappeared in any substantial way until now" (199). He argues that contemporary writers, "identify the Indian as the one potential 'ancestor' who is close to the soil, organically and elementally connected with it" (199). In spite of this, such an identification cannot synthesize difference. It bears repeating that,

> [t]he interplay between inside and outside occurs both for myself and for the other though in a manner that cannot be mediated by a dialectic because the positions cannot be made reversible. It thus does not culminate in a synthesis, but in a respect for the Otherness of the other, a recognition of difference not an *alter ego*, a letting go of the desire to be completely in charge of human universality [. . . .] [E]very human individual exists in a relation between particularity and universality. But the universality is only available through the mediation of the Other's particularity, which I can only see as practices from the outside. (Angus, *Border* 161)

This respect for otherness is a problem all of the novels in this study struggle with as they attempt to tell stories that recognize both that particularity is worth defending and that this defense needs to open out to others as well, that particularity "is endangered, that it *should* be preserved and extended" and "that this project requires that such a right be extended to *others* as well" (Angus, *Border* 160). Thus, the resistance of the residents of Forty Mile, the defence of particularity that they achieved, needs to open out to universalizing justifications of others' particularities as well. This is a much more difficult task.

However, while in Alberta, on the prairies, in Canada, in North America, it is impossible for non-Natives to have the same indigeneity as Native peoples, it is necessary that the stories non-Natives tell begin from the conflict within their particularity. This conflict necessarily involves an engagement with the question of indigeneity that does not claim to be indigenous. Telling King's different, ethical, story requires defence of what is good in the various traditions of this place without attempting to impose that good on others. We can only "indigenize," as Len Findlay calls on us to do, as a process that does not have belonging, the sameness of indigeneity, as its goal. Telling Friesen's "common narrative" can only occur, ethically, by recognizing its incompleteness, by recognizing that the space called Alberta continues to engage with history in its being as place.

Chapter Two: Liebhaber Interrupts the Novel and Vice Versa: Community, Myth, Irony, and Love in *What the Crow Said*

> What is the discourse of region? How, in the complexity of our experience of the Great Plains, do we turn that experience into words? The answers are many. And yet they cohere around something we call community.
>
> —*Robert Kroetsch*, "Regionalism, Postmodernism, and Robert Kroetsch: An Introduction" (1994)

> The singular voice of interruption is not a voice without courage. This courage, however, is not—as one might at first think—the courage to say something that it would be dangerous to dare to proclaim. Of course, such courage exists—but the courage to interruption consists rather in daring to be silent, or rather, to put it less summarily, it consists in *allowing to be said* something that no one—no individual, no representative, could ever say: a voice that could never be the voice of any subject, a speech that could never be the conviction of any understanding and that is merely the voice and the thought of community in the interruption of myth. At once *an* interrupted voice, and the voiceless interruption of every general or particular voice.
>
> —*Jean-Luc Nancy*, The Inoperative Community (1991)

Turning the experience of region into words and calling it community: this is representation at work, myth-making, the illusory coherence of a system denying its excess, the mystification of the "we." However, it is also the re-presentation of the necessary and irreducible condition of existence: co-existence. A subject never fully achieves coherence; homelessness persists alongside belonging. The "discourse of region" necessarily excludes what is outside the region, but that is, also, precisely, what it is unable to do. Calling something "community" both suggests a self-sufficient unity and reveals its dependence on others, the co-existence on which existence depends. Land, labour, and language—the productive foundations of systems, which systems attempt to represent as internal, elements like any other—are all employed in representations of the experience of a region as community, and exceed those representations. The excess produced by those foundations continues to interrupt that striving for the unity of community through representational work, through turning the experience of place into words. What we call community, then, is not community itself, the inapprehensible and unrepresentable sharing among singularities, but a representation of community that, like all concepts, only achieves its meaning through the circulation of signifiers that depend on difference and deferral.

In *What the Crow Said* Robert Kroetsch attempts to write a new story of the prairie region, but one that, instead of repeating the rural-communal myth of unity and coherence, both draws upon that myth and retains excessive diversity. Robert R. Wilson suggests, in *Labyrinths of Voice*, that "one of the axioms of *What the Crow Said* is that Alberta is pretechnological and oral in its culture" (Kroetsch 72), but elsewhere writes that "Kroetsch cannot prevent the technological world from intervening, as when the Armed Forces' F-104s fly over Big Indian" (Wilson, "Boundary" 44). This results in a novel that "is cloven upon the disjunction between the claims of fantasy and the too-well-known outlines of Albertan culture" (Wilson 44). This division is, for Stephen Slemon, "the characteristic maneuver of magic realist fiction" as "its two separate narrative modes ["magic" and "realist"] never manage to arrange themselves into any kind of hierarchy" ("Magic" 410). I would suggest that the division between the "magic" and the "real" in the novel is not, though, equivalent to the division between the pre-technological and the technological, as Wilson would have it. Gus Liebhaber works in a world that, thanks to the technology of moveable type, considers the past irrelevant. It is the world of modern, technological man even if female, indigenous, oral, or natural excesses to this worldview are prominent; even if these excesses are axiomatic, foundational.

The division of magic and real, then, occurs within a notion of history that, on the one hand is fixed and enclosed, and on the other is riddled with excess and contradiction. As Slemon states, "[p]rint, in obliterating the need for memory, inevitably contains and fixes the past as dead record of the monuments of achievement, but it also creates marginal spaces in which the silenced voices of totalizing systems can speak" ("Magic" 418). While "North Americans have no history before the age of progress" (Grant, *Philosophy* 22), there is an outside to that history, even if it is not "ours," and literature is able to touch upon it (through a kind of "magic") and introduce play into the "normally" ("real") hierarchical binaries of our modes of thought.

The struggle to avoid arranging these elements in a hierarchy while also avoiding a static, quietist, paralysis is what the novel is engaged in. As Rosemary Sullivan asserts, "[i]f a work of literature is to be possible, the writer must be able to conceive of a coherent environment. The continual rehearsals over *sense of place* and cultural identity in our literature are directed by this impulse [. . .] [b]ut it is a mistake to conceive of this in geographical terms only as the search for definitions of landscape and place" (165). She goes on to argue that

> what is at stake is coherence, the demand for informing structures, imaginative frameworks to order experience. The prevalent interest in myth is thus axiomatically a corollary of the quest for a coherent environment. Yet it is not simply the search for a point of reference in the ancestral past, the archivist's hunger for continuities. It is the search for structures that inform. (165)

This coherence of informing structures suggests to me the struggle for community of settler/invaders in the new world, in North America, in Canada, in Alberta, a struggle for a community that does not have "a [single] point of reference in the ancestral past" as an origin. Rather it has many answers to the problem of turning the experience of place into words that cohere around something called "community," and, in that cohering, interrupt their own axioms by touching upon the silence excluded in achieving that coherence. The informing structures that provide coherence, that build homes, are necessary, but these structures depend on a relation with otherness. Ignoring that relationship allows the capture of productive excess to go unnoticed.

In his struggle against Gutenberg and moveable type, Liebhaber is trying to find some means of belonging after Gutenberg "made all memory of the past irrelevant" (59). In thus making the past irrelevant, Gutenberg stands in for the founder of the "modern consciousness," which posits that "evil [will] be overcome in the future" (Grant, *Philosophy* 46). However, along with this belief in progress as the product of human effort, an understanding of human dependency on an order not of our making was also lost; a myth of individual autonomy became possible. Along with this order, a way of justifying the continuation of particularity disappeared. This orientation toward futurity becomes the dominant tradition in the new world, and Liebhaber is trying to create some belonging within this tradition. His inability to remember the past, because of his orientation toward the future, cuts him off from a preceding tradition of belonging. The indeterminacy of Old Lady Lang, the absent presence of the nameless Cree buffalo hunter after whom the town is named, and the disruptive articulations of the crow, remain, in their silences, outside of Liebhaber's explanations. The interruptions of these explanations, especially by "what the crow said," reveal excesses to the belonging through dominance sought by Liebhaber and the town's other men.

Liebhaber asserts that he is "not going to die" (14) and works through the novel to free himself from death, perhaps the most inapprehensible aspect of human existence. Nancy argues that "[d]eath irremediably exceeds the resources of a metaphysics of the subject. [. . .] If the *I* cannot say that it is dead, if the *I* disappears in effect in *its* death, in that death that is precisely what is most proper to it and most inalienably its own, it is because the *I* is not—*am* not—a subject" (*Inoperative* 14). Or, as George Grant argues, "[m]ost of us have forgotten our true status. We do not have complete control of ourselves, we are not independent of others, at birth and death we are helpless, and never at any time are we autonomous (the maker of our own laws)" (*Justice* 113). One definition of modernity is the desire for such autonomy; Liebhaber embodies this desire. Insofar as his various claims to success in the novel—and those of all other members of the town—are shown to be failures because of the continuation of excess, because of the deconstruction of these claims by that excess, the novel destabilizes the hierarchical binary between subject and object.

Liebhaber attempts to achieve metaphysical closure, to create a myth, but all of his attempts to "work" community are undone because they either ignore or appropriate excess, and excess continually reasserts itself. In this sense the story is Liebhaber vs. the novel. It is Liebhaber against the excessive productivity of narrative. Liebhaber, "[t]he civilizing man: at the center, and yet uninvolved" (Kroetsch, *Crow* 62), attempts to exert order within and against the conventions of narrative, which continually generate excess. He seeks to interrupt the conventions of narrative while those conventions continually interrupt his seeking.

In *Labyrinths of Voice* Kroetsch says, "*I think one of the paradoxes of serious art is its reliance on an audience that is grounded in conventions*" (191). How do we get out of the apparent closure of this circle of conventions? Ian Angus argues that

> [t]he plurality of discourses can be characterized within a single discourse precisely because other discourses are not eternally, in principle, exterior to it. A contingent exteriority can always be reduced by translation into an interiority. This is not, it must be recalled, a claim that through translation a discourse appropriates all that is true or enlightening in another discourse, which would be to return to a representational theory of truth. Here, we remain firmly within the performative modification. The notion of postmodernity as the inability to totalize a plurality of discourses must therefore be understood as a dynamic relation. It is best formulated as a *continuous process* of failure to establish a discourse totalizing discourses, or a meta-discourse of the whole, within an open field in which there is continuous translation between discourses. (*(Dis)Figurations* 238).

Such a meta-narrative is sought by the men in *Crow* and it is in the re-presentation of persistent excess that the novel is able to call attention to the failure of this totalization. Discussing *The Words of My Roaring*, Sullivan argues that for Johnnie Backstrom, "[a]ll action is located in the self. The paradox of romantic egotism is that it cannot put trust in the self by reference to something larger outside the self, be it Kroetsch's 'community' or 'God'. Yet at the same time it demands for the self, total control" (170). The same may be said of Liebhaber in his quest to overcome death. There is a continued demand for structure and coherence, but a refusal of any "outside" structure. Nevertheless, this "metaphysics of the subject" continually relies on otherness, something larger outside the self. The fact of art's dependence on conventions proves this reliance, even in paradox. The desire to appropriate total control into the self can only be represented, paradoxically, through a reliance on a preceding set of conventions that exceed the self. Even though these conventions can be "translated" from one discourse to another to generate "newness," this process of translation cannot be completed in such a way that all other discourses become appropriated into a single meta-discourse. Similarly, Liebhaber's reliance on language exposes his lack of total control. This struggle with dependency is prominent in Kroetsch's thought and his comments and writings elsewhere can help to illuminate the particular example of *Crow*.

Kroetsch on Myth and Interrupting Mythic Place in *Crow*

In *What the Crow Said* the reader is presented with a fabulous world, a world that takes an ironic view of myth to expose the danger of singularity and enclosed systems, even as it represents characters striving toward such closure. Kroetsch claims that this novel is his "own personal struggle with the temptation of meaning, and it's the reader's struggle too. Some readers were so compelled to impose on it a total explanation instead of allowing the . . . game to happen" (*Labyrinths* 15). Kroetsch claims to resist singularity, the synthesis of structuralism, the universal story of the monomyth, which, essentially, strips stories of their particularities, their differences, to focus on their structural similarities, and creates a homogeneity reduced to the lowest common denominator, a single hegemonic meta-narrative that explains all others.

Avoiding the temptation of meaning should not be understood, though, as a desire to avoid meaning entirely; since all language signifies, such a project would be both hopeless and absurd. Rather, we can understand it as a desire to avoid the temptation to impose meaning, to control (absolutely) how the text will signify, even if this resistance remains complicit, since the author still stands behind the text no matter how "readerly" it becomes. Susan Rudy Dorscht suggests that Kroetsch's "archaeological" method "often makes modes of production of textual knowledge apparent, foregrounds the processes by which a knowledge is made to seem 'natural'" (73). As author, Kroetsch tries to avoid elaborating the novel into a unity, but, in relinquishing control, must allow the reader to develop whatever partial unity the story will have. The novel opens a space in which the reader can play. Imposing a singular meaning, even if that is a denial of meaning, brings the game to an end.

In struggling to achieve this resistance and avoid the temptation of meaning, Kroetsch sometimes comes dangerously close to valorizing the difference in absolute opposition to the unity, which, indeed, would simply be a new form of unity as the denial of meaning. And, as Angus has shown, when, "there is no general characterization, there cannot be differences. They all become indifferent in the face of an infinite plurality of differences" ("Locality" 23). Shirley Neuman asks Kroetsch about the distinction he sees between anecdote and myth, and his answer suggests his privileging of difference, but also the necessary interplay that prevents difference from becoming the simple negation of unity:

> Neuman: You mentioned earlier that you were quite interested in moving away from myth as traditionally conceived and towards anecdote in *What the Crow Said*. Do you see anecdote as a way of constructing new mythemes?

> Kroetsch: I see anecdote as touching upon larger patterns without involving itself with them. I think that is one of the things anecdote does. Anecdote stays looser than myth because it hasn't compromised itself for a larger pattern. (*Labyrinths* 115)

This might suggest the replacement of mythic universality with anecdotal parochialism, but he avoids, at least in *What the Crow Said*, completely valorizing anecdote as an anti-myth, which would be another myth denying its outside, compromising itself for another, if not larger, pattern.

While Linda Hutcheon claims that "[a]necdote counteracts the organizing principles of myth in his [Kroetsch's] fiction" (165), such a counteracting could easily become a kind of regionalist parochialism, especially in a writer whose work "is rooted very firmly in the geographical, historical, and cultural world of Alberta" (Hutcheon 175). However, for Kroetsch, anecdote continues to "touch upon" those "larger patterns." In the first entry in *The* 'Crow' *Journals* Kroetsch records the idea for a novel about an "itinerant prairie printer" based on "my own (rural?) experience, basically, expanded towards the tall tale, the mythological; but always the hard core of detail" (11). This suggests Kroetsch's method of resistance to the potential indifference of postmodernism. Angus argues that for postmodernism, often, "*[t]his place* becomes simply *any place*, and the *here* is just another *there*. Or, on the other hand, there arises the problem of fundamentalism" ("Locality" 23). Kroetsch's description of the genesis of the novel seeks to mediate this binary by refusing to create a hierarchy of indifference over fundamentalism. On the one hand, he seeks to move from his own experience toward the mythological, and, on the other, to maintain the "hard core of detail." Place is neither fundamental, denying its outside, nor indifferent, essentially the same as all others; it moves between these poles refusing to make them hierarchical.

The novel's setting, as both particular and indeterminate, embodies this movement. It is the parkland region of Kroetsch's youth, moved slightly east into that section of Alberta that was previously part of Saskatchewan:[36]

> [t]he Municipality of Bigknife lay ambiguously on the border between Alberta and Saskatchewan; no one, due to a surveyor's error, had ever been able to locate conclusively where the boundaries were supposed to be. The south end of the municipality, beyond the poplar bluffs and the fields of grain, faded into bald prairie and a Hutterite colony; the north end vanished into bush country and an Indian reserve. (28).

The boundaries between the centre—the municipality proper, and its town, Big Indian—and its outside fade and vanish into the otherness of the Hutterite Colony and Indian Reserve. These boundaries exist, but "no one" can locate them "conclusively." There is no clear separation between heartland and hinterland, yet difference persists. There is difference between the municipality and its outsides, but the borders are blurry. Even though the mostly white, mostly male, mostly English-speaking town is the centre of the "community," its name shows a reliance on otherness that has not been fully appropriated and cannot be appropriated even by the apparently rational, abstract, and indifferent system of surveying. Although the "Indian reserve" is outside the municipality, the trace in the name of the main settlement, Big Indian, puts indigeneity at the centre. Similarly, the Lang women both penetrate into the heart of the male preserve (when Tiddy enters the beer parlour) and exist on the farm independent of men.

At the same time that what is inside the municipality depends on what is outside, the setting remains local and does not extend into a global indifference to place. When Isador Heck is sent out of the municipality on his mission to bring John Skandl back to save the desperate men, isolated in the seemingly endless card game[37] that they convince themselves they control, that which is beyond the local remains unknowable. When asked about his experience touring the country as a man shot out of a cannon he would say, "[i]t would make a pig laugh" (126). When attempting to render his experience in words, he told "of airplanes that flew without propellers, of highways that were made of solid cement but soared through the air. Then everyone else in the beer parlor broke into uncontrollable laughter" (126). The outside remains inapprehensible and is only glimpsed or hinted at through humour. Kroetsch says that this is the result of the axioms he had established for the novel and that while he intended to have Heck go out and explore the world, "[t]he idea broke my rules, or a lot of the axioms, and he couldn't go. He could only come back and say that he had been there, which is quite a different thing. He had to speak according to the axioms established in Big Indian when he came back" (*Labyrinths* 72). The established discourse prevents certain statements, but the permitted statements are able to suggest those that are prevented. A border exists that does not prevent physical movement, but does prevent otherness from being reduced to sameness.

Heck's experience leads him to change his belief "that nothing existed"; he becomes convinced, rather, that, "everything existed. Flying through the air, lifted away from the earth, looking down, he had, if nothing else, glimpsed the truth" (126). This sort of swing between absolute polar opposites is evidence of men's desire for systematic closure, but also suggests the incompletion of such attempts: Heck's flights through the air are always marked by a return to earth. The narration, though, in its claim that through Heck's flights he was able to glimpse the truth, mystifies the dependence of this transcendental term on its other. Heck has only achieved this "enlightenment" by leaving "the schmier game with every last cent of the other players' cash" (126). His "truth-claim" requires the sacrifice of his other players, but seeks to mystify this sacrifice and suggest systematic closure. When the narration is understood as ironic this closure becomes impossible.

Irony and the Narration of Communal Hierarchy

From the opening line of the novel—"[p]eople, years later, blamed everything on the bees; it was the bees, they said, seducing Vera Lang that started everything" (1)—the reader has to contend with the instability of many voices becoming one, and then dividing again. Who exactly is included and who is excluded in this "people," whose beliefs the narrator reports, is never made clear by the text. It does become clear, though, that when "they" agree, the text has moved into the indifferent unity of myth, by which dominance is disguised, hierarchy mystified, and the difference of excess excluded. The novel's opening is a creation myth, but the unity created, the origin, remains deferred.[38] It is only "years later" that "people" agreed; the belonging of community is already interrupted by a homelessness revealed through the excessive encounter between Vera and the bees. It is only the subsequent act of storytelling that mystifies this excessive origin.

This "agreement" among "people" is always interrupted in the novel as it is revealed, through irony, as the product of interested particularities claiming the right to "speak for," to structure, the community as united. If we read the novel with Miranda Joseph's insight in mind, that "commons" "are in fact socially formed and historically determined and that in their particular forms they tend to support particular arrangements of power" (32), then the "communal" narrator is not simply the "single voice of the omniscient and omnipresent third-person narrator" (Tiefensee 117), but (also) one of Kroetsch's nameless namers, "from the dominant force or class in society" (*Lovely* 44), who is complicit in the men's absurd attempts to "restore" order, to belong. The narrator appears to prescribe the limits of community, but, through irony, also inscribes the resistance of community to that myth.

Critics tend to read the narrator as "communal," but, if it is, it is also, from the first sentence, indicative of hierarchy. Vera is excluded; she, presumably, is not one of the "people" who "blames" the bees as the event sets her on the path to becoming an apiculturist. We read, for instance, that "*[p]erhaps* Vera had gone simply to pick a bouquet of crocuses" (1, emphasis added); her motives are not explained, but merely guessed at, and "no one" (2) explains why she takes her clothes off or lies down. Vera "never told" "[w]hat her terror must have been" (2) at having the bees descend on her, and yet we are told with certainty that the bees were "[s]couting for a nest, a new place to hive" (2). Vera maintains silence, and the men speak for her and for nature, representing the interaction as one of "terror."[39] Further, I will suggest, women, in the novel, more generally are not involved in this communal laying of blame. Rather, men (specifically white men) stand in, as the group entitled to speak, for all the people of Big Indian. As Kenneth Burke has it, hierarchy contains within it "the entelechial tendency, the treatment of the 'top' or 'culminating' stage as the 'image' that best represents the entire 'idea'" (Burke 141). Here the (white) men claim to represent Big Indian (and the town's name is another significant silence that the men attempt, and fail, to speak for), to possess the preparatory culture that will enable them to transcend the silent excesses of otherness (natural, female, aboriginal).

The first chapter ends with

> [t]he men, below her, downriver in the valley, in the town: *they* heard the surrendered call. Years later, *they* would claim to have smelled the moment too [. . .] *They* heard the outcry of her painful joy, those men, the extremist coming; *they* heard, each of them, and *they* knew. Not knowing her name, or where she was, or what had touched her into that fierce and passionate and desperate ululation: *they* knew no man would satisfy her. Not one. No mortal man would satisfy her. (6, emphasis added)

The "they" of the community is clearly identified with its men here, and the opening marks the revelation of a break in their patriarchal authority: the men now know, without knowing her, that Vera exists outside the normative bounds of heterosexual desire, and this break provides an easy scapegoat for the men's subsequent failures to explain/control the world. Her sexuality exceeds the limits *they* seek to impose and maintain. And, when nature similarly exceeds their explanatory narratives, a new narrative is constructed that unites Vera's sexuality and natural excess in an attempt to re-appropriate them: to explain the world, they blame the bees. Liebhaber's quest, then, as Tiefensee shows, is to rework the unity of community, supposedly lost by the men in this moment, by appropriating all of the excess into himself.

However, because the text takes an ironic stance, the absurdity of this narrative hierarchy is exposed. Kathleen Wall argues that

> [i]t is appropriately difficult, given Kroetsch's preoccupation with the 'temptation of meaning' to decide which causes actually operate meaningfully in Kroetsch's border cosmos, and which are asserted by the inhabitants of Big Indian in an effort to impose a perceived, explicable order on a world that seems to defy one's logical or experiential expectations. This difficulty is attributable to Kroetsch's use of a communal third person narrator. (91)

That is to say that the narration generates confusion; it mystifies the relation between cause and effect, between subject and object, between the re-presentation that interrupts myths and the interpretation that founds them, between the roles of storyteller and critic. Nevertheless, Kroetsch suggests that the rules of the game are set out for the reader in the opening pages: "I would hope that by the time he's [sic] into Chapter III, say, in that novel [*What the Crow Said*], he would have seen what is happening and would be reading creatively [. . .] you have to send these signals very early to readers so that they begin to see what grammatical shifts they have to make" (*Labyrinths* 61). Literature necessarily resists myth by re-presenting, presenting in a new way, foregrounding, its biases, the interpretation on which it is based. These "grammatical shifts" can be understood as characteristics of irony, by which the author and the (educated/initiated) reader share certain information that is denied to (at least some) characters.

Tiefensee reads Kroetsch's statement about informing the reader as, nevertheless, suggesting the continuation of authorial dominance and the maintenance of a subordinate role for the reader. She argues that the reader "will be an active reader, playing the game according to the rules decreed by the god, the hero, who, in writing the work, has 'made up the game plan'" (117). This leads her to conclude that, despite the multiplicity of the text, "multiplicity is dependent upon and generated from a principle of unity, a totalizing Presence that is achieved in *Crow* through Liebhaber" (118). This understanding of the concept of "game," though, differs from that of Kroetsch: "[i]t's interesting that we **play** the **game**, isn't it? There is a double thing that goes on even in the statement which is very fascinating to me. The two words contradict each other in a signifying way. *Play* resists the necessary rules of the *game*" (*Labyrinths* 50).[40] That is to suggest that the reader is encouraged to play against the rules, even as they remain "necessary," set out by the "god" of the text, Kroetsch, or his avatar, Liebhaber: "[f]or the reader to 'play' the reading game in *What the Crow Said* s/he can transgress the rules as much as the writer does, putting together *or* dismantling the text in whatever way s/he chooses, telling her story" (Dorscht 78). Liebhaber may want to achieve a totalizing presence in the novel, Kroetsch may even want to achieve this through Liebhaber (we cannot know), but it is the reader's responsibility to resist this closure.

That is to say that the text creates a limit at which author and reader share the challenge of resisting the signifying nature of language, of narrative, a challenge that both inevitably fail but can take up again. Narratives call for beginnings and endings, and "the familiar patterns of our thought" can represent this movement as a unity, to some extent requires this appearance of unity, of convention, of coherence,[41] but it can be undone again in re-tellings and re-readings. The novel creates meaning in a circuit of information transfer between author and reader, but that circuit is not closed. If the book is a game, the rules of which are (partly) created by the author, then we are encouraged to play with the author, not to win, but to keep the sharing, that is made possible by the game, going.

This sharing is undertaken, partly, through irony, as seen in the opening line—"[p]eople, years later, blamed everything on the bees" (1)—which alerts readers that the narrator is playing with us. Hayden White claims that

> [t]he trope of Irony [. . .] provides a linguistic paradigm of a mode of thought which is radically self-critical with respect not only to a given characterization of the world of experience but also to the very effort to capture adequately the truth of things in language. It is, in short, a model of the linguistic protocol in which skepticism in thought and relativism in ethics are conventionally expressed. [. . .] Existentially projected into a full-blown world view, Irony would appear to be transideological. [. . .] [A]s the basis of a world view, Irony tends to dissolve all belief in the possibility of positive political actions. In its apprehension of the essential folly or absurdity of the human condition, it tends to engender belief in the 'madness' of civilization itself and to inspire a Mandarin-like disdain for those seeking to grasp the nature of social reality in either science or art. (37)

This "folly or absurdity of the human condition" is exposed, if not expressed, by the narrator of *Crow* throughout the text as we witness the repeated failures of the men to satisfactorily explain or control the world they inhabit. Again, the novel's first line is paradigmatic—the first clue to the reader as to how the novel should be read—because it uses a non-specific, general, subject—"people"—to make an absurd causal link, to explain the actions of insects in terms of human agency, exposing the irony of human attempts to understand and explain the world. Their failure to either escape or control systems requires the kind of fatalistic explanation with which the novel opens. The blame is placed on the bees (communal insects) and the men seek to absolve themselves through a fatalistic view of nature. They assert an explanation for the actions of the bees (they were looking for a new place to hive, a new home), but their explanations are outside of the "wild order" (Angus, *Border* 196) of the bees, which exceeds human understanding.

However, the novel does not end with the simple indifference or disdain of irony that White suggests is the end of such a worldview. Indeed, accepting Irony as a "world view" would institute a new myth, a belief that "the essential folly or absurdity of the human condition" can be "apprehended," a myth of indifference, as I suggested above. Expressing such a "world view" would be, always already, ironic, since it would claim to represent absurdity through the rational system of language. Rather, the novel exists between civilization and wilderness, hope and doubt, particularity and universality, in short, in the inapprehensible realm of community. Whether the outside of society, which is shown to be an arbitrary construct, is absurdity or reason, chaos or cosmos, is not determined by the novel: it depends on the reader playing the game to discover possible informing structures and their absence.

The maintenance of a border between self and other, which permits the sharing of community, functions, in the novel, through the narrator, yet, the narrator, as a communal voice, also threatens dominance over the individual voices of the inhabitants, threatens to become the universal voice of omniscience if the excess that its irony reveals is not heeded. Robert R. Wilson claims that "the collective and unnamed narrator recounts the shared experience of the town of Big Indian" ("Introduction" vii). He continues,

> [t]he voice speaking, inviting readers into a good story, is an actual character, although they will never meet him (or her) but only hear his voice. He knows the intimate details of life in Big Indian, he can imagine hidden desires and other motivations, and he is [. . .] heavily ironic. Above all, he speaks collectively. He is the voice of the entire community over a period of twenty-five years. [. . .] He knows everything that matters, and his memory runs back and forth over everything that has happened since the springtime moment when the swarm of bees raped Vera Lang. [. . .] 'They'—'some' 'people'—have told the story of Big Indian, and the narrator reports what has happened as versions of what has been said. This might seem like deliberate vagueness, a narrative refusal to make things clear. What it actually does is to summon the many different voices of the community, over a period of years, speculating, advancing hypotheses, telling quite different stories about the same event. ("Introduction" xv)

It may, though, be *both* deliberate vagueness *and* the summoning of many different voices: the "communal" voice of the narrator is that of "some" people, but, instead of foregrounding this, "they" generate a vague communal narrator, who mystifies this fact. It is the irony that reveals that the narrator does not "know everything that matters" and only "imagines" that he (I think it is undoubtedly male) knows the "hidden desires" and "motivations" of all the characters. The voice "speaks for" the community, but this act of representation is political, involving, first, an act of interpretation. It works to make the excesses of the community's stories yield to meaning, but continually fails to achieve this. The novel's men undertake specific work to make natural excess yield. The men's failures in this realm become obvious despite the narrator's representations that, in their irony, reveal while concealing.

Unworking the Myth of Work

In the novel, men rebel, ludicrously, against limits, but are also determined to explain the world and control it (through language and technology—the imposition of limits, which they attempt to make absolute). Christine Jackman has shown that "[w]hen the men fight the women, the sky, death, time, the dark, the hot and the fecund, they fight the products of their own patriarchal fiction. In fighting the product of their own fiction, the men are, thus, fighting themselves." That is, they are fighting the excess on which their systems are founded in attempts to incorporate it. The logic of systems requires that excess be represented as part of the system: "*[t]he very idea of a system consists in turning this productive origin inside and representing it as simply another factor within the system*" (Angus, *Border* 188). Following the revelation of natural and female excesses that are outside the (white, male) community's explanatory myth that occurs with Vera's impregnation by the bees, the men in the community undertake various attempts to appropriate the newly apparent excess into their mythic story through work.

Two means of turning the productive excess of nature into a profit, through which the community prospers briefly, are John Skandl's ice business and Vera's Boy's agricultural predictions. The first occurs early in the novel, after the snow fails to melt in the spring following Vera's impregnation by the bees through which the men, and the narrator representing them, link natural and female productivity as dangerous excesses. While initially the strange weather means that Skandl, "can't cut ice because it's almost summer, and [he] can't sell ice because it's almost winter. This time it's belly-up for sure" (11), when the river freezes again he soon declares that "every snowflake is a penny" (40). Between the threat of the business's demise and its salvation, Martin Lang dies. On the night of his death, Vera goes to Skandl for help, crossing the river on the ice. The narrator explains Skandl's surprise at this fact: "[t]he honeycombed ice of spring was useless to the railways. But Vera had crossed the river where there should have been open water" (23). Suddenly, the ice has become "useful" again; the natural excess of cold weather will produce a profitable yield for Skandl.

The equation of snowflakes and pennies suggests that natural excess can be commodified without remainder: snow equals profit. Although capturing this excess benefits Skandl most of all, he depends on others to accomplish his goals and attempts to persuade them that it is in their best interests to work for him: "[e]very snowflake is money in everybody's pockets. The country is paved with money. The ice is thickening fast. We must work day and night" (40). Indeed, for a time the town prospers from the ice business and Skandl builds a tower of ice as a monument to his success and a symbol of the unity of community. In spite of this, his ultimate goal, to "destroy all his rivals—Liebhaber first—by constructing, out of blocks of perfect ice, a lighthouse" (37) and marry Tiddy Lang (which may or may not have actually happened), remains just out of reach as the weather breaks and the tower collapses. Skandl leaves the community to lobby the provincial government (which one we are not told) to undertake a "program of road building and flood control" (53).[42] This attempt to respond to the change in the excess provided by nature is never completed because Skandl dies in a plane crash on his return to Big Indian. The flood with which the novel ends is indicative of the continued inapprehensibility of nature.

The second event that brings prosperity to the district is the agricultural predictions of Vera's Boy. His conception is a mark of excess, as is his early life (Vera throws him to the wolves to save herself (52) and he is raised by coyotes (117)). The community attempts to reappropriate this excess when they discover, without being able to understand it, that he is capable of predicting agricultural outcomes and that they can profit from this fact: "the boy's simple talent was to be the basis of the next wave of prosperity in the Municipal District of Bigknife" (120). Again, though, the systematic capture of excess as a yield is unable to contain the wild order operating according to other principles. Vera's Boy's first error occurs when "[h]e told Droniuk how to raise a half-section of perfect wheat" (124), and, when "fall came, the wheat stood waist high and yellow in the field" but Droniuk "fell into his threshing machine while raging at the sky because the huge field of wheat proved to be all straw without grain" (124). Grain, of course, is the yield Droniuk hopes to profit from and the means by which he would be able to reproduce his "perfect" field. Its absence suggests both that the excess nature provides is indeterminate and therefore uncommodifiable, and that natural "perfection" cannot be reproduced. The narrator calls this a "miscalculation" (124) on the part of Vera's Boy, but it is also possible that his definition of "perfection" is not the same as Droniuk's.

> All of the various attempts at transcendence through work fail. Jackman writes: Skandl dies when his plane falls from the sky [. . .] (135). O'Holleran 'fell, landing headfirst in an open bag of drilling mud' (144), in a rage because the

> derrick had discovered only 'a dry hole' (143). Droniuk 'fell into his threshing machine while raging at the sky because the huge field of wheat proved to be all straw without grain' (140). (Jackman's parentheses)

Nature refuses/fails, in these instances, to provide the kind of excess that the men predict and expect to capture as a yield through their gendered acts (drilling, planting, etc.); they then become enraged, and die as a result, fighting against the foundations of their own systems. The excesses provided in the above examples (straw, mud, wind, rain, etc.) are seen as useless—they are too unpredictable to be captured as yields. They cannot be "worked." The land continually produces excesses that do not yield, but, in responding to these excesses, people employ language to retrospectively fix those excesses. The "people," speaking "years later," through the "communal" narrator, attempt this in their representation of Vera in the novel's opening, although the doubling (and duplicity) of irony eludes this fixity. Controlling excess through language is Liebhaber's great hope.

The Myth of Liebhaber

Despite the failure of other men, Liebhaber, the hero, believes in his ability to overcome death and systems. Following Vera Lang's impregnation by bees we have "the year the snow didn't melt" (7). Causality is implied, by the men and the structure of the narrative, between these two events, but no evidence other than the narrative convention of juxtaposition is offered. Those who know the conventions will recognize an implied causality, but this type of convention is precisely what the novel sets out to play with.

Immediately after the first two brief chapters, which quickly present Vera's encounter with the bees and the failure of the snow to melt, we meet Gus Liebhaber, who has, for the first of three times in the novel, “remembered the future” (9). This prophetic gift distinguishes Liebhaber[43] and sets him in conflict with the commonly accepted and unnoticed systems that structure the world, its conventions. He has foreseen the death of Martin Lang, and, as printer of the *Big Indian Signal* decides to write Lang’s obituary, “slightly in advance of the event” (9); foreknowledge, though, makes the conventions of the obituary form apparent and Liebhaber struggles to resist letting the narrative of “obituary” write itself:

> he flicked the letter M into place: *Martin Lang, long-time resident of the Municipality of Bigknife, passed away unexpectedly...*
>
> Unexpectedly? Was it fair to say unexpectedly? (9).

In the end, Liebhaber, “couldn’t finish the page” (10) because his expectation of the event disrupts the narrative conventions of the obituary. Peter Thomas writes that the

> first step in Liebhaber’s revolt against Gutenberg [. . .] is also his stand against the ‘domestication’ of ‘free, beautiful letters’ in his cases of type and ‘the tyranny of rote’ (69). The biography of an ‘ordinary man’ makes a radical demand, which Liebhaber cannot meet [. . .] and the pages are left blank, a graphic instance of language yielding to silence. (*RK* 104)

This reverses the normal process of capturing the productivity of language as a yield: instead of the infinite potential of silence yielding to the particular constraints of narrative, the narrative of biography yields to silence. However, this reversal is insufficient; accepting the impossibility of controlling language is to remain silent and adopt quietism. Liebhaber, faced with his inability to control language, heads to the beer parlor.

The men in the novel repeatedly rebel against "domestication" of various kinds but attempt to impose it on nature and others. Liebhaber struggles against language, but, "[w]hile [in the end] he relinquishes the organizing power of master narratives, Liebhaber needs language with which to write the moment" (Jackman).[44] He cannot control language and he cannot escape it. Lecker suggests that "Liebhaber's text [of Lang's obituary] becomes a model of *What the Crow Said*, in that the page (the 'story') is intentionally left incomplete and unclosed (the sidestick and footstick are abandoned); the form (Liebhaber's 'story' and Kroetsch's novel) defies the conventional 'lock up' that would bind the text in a prescribed frame" (101). This defiance still remains reliant on pre-existing conventions, though: as Hoeppner has it, although Kroetsch "says he 'didn't want to elaborate it [the novel] all into its own unity' [. . .] he implies that such an elaboration is possible" and "it is interesting to consider some of the features of the unwritten work that the reader creates in the process of reading" (230). If, as Hoeppner suggests, following Frye, in the novel "the reader is the hero" (230), then it is up to the reader to take the fragments of the narrative, the excesses that exceed the frame, and "make them fit" (Kroetsch, *Crow* 12). However, adopting such a role requires "action possible only in the world of myth" (Hoeppner 235), and the comic failures of the men in the novel, and of Liebhaber especially, are a warning to us to be wary of the temptation of myth.

Liebhaber desires freedom from the system of language, but such freedom would require that he achieve a position of dominance in relation to it. He leaves the obituary unfinished, but the paper still comes out (14). Liebhaber can refuse the system, but it continues without him. Rather than escaping the conventions of narrative, then, the novel points to what exceeds them. Although the novel may be incomplete and unclosed in one sense, it still comes to an end. It is only through the agency of the reader that this ending can avoid being a closure, can avoid using what is known of the conventions of narrative to elaborate the novel into a unity.

Such resistance to limits remains Liebhaber's goal throughout the novel, but making it a goal suggests that it can be achieved through work, and the novel repeatedly shows how work cannot appropriate excess. The system of language, for example, creates meaning even when one works against it: "[Liebhaber] set the word OUT [...] He left the T on the table. He placed the U on the windowsill. He carried the O into his living room. But he knew the word OUT was still OUT" (47). Later, Liebhaber struggles against "the domestication of those free, beautiful letters." Or rather, "it was the absurdity of their recited order that afflicted him: ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ—he opened a twenty-six of rye and, with immense effort, tried to disentangle himself from the tyranny of rote" (60). The opposition of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet (meaning) versus the twenty-six ounces of rye (oblivion) suggests a binary. But this logic breaks down; the letters are arbitrary signs that are beyond his control and control him, while the rye is material and concrete; he can possess and control it even though it will lead to a loss of control once consumed. Lecker notes that "Liebhaber fails to reduce language to nothing. He fails to create the silence that would liberate him from story. And because he fails, he uses liquor to anesthetize the pain of loss" (102). He cannot possess the productivity of language, which would enable his liberation. The meaning that is created by the particular linguistic system that Liebhaber is in cannot be escaped or transcended or captured, only pointed out through "partial and plural definitions" (Angus, *Border* 193).

This is the task the novel undertakes to reveal through Liebhaber and which it calls on the reader to continue. In *Labyrinths of Voice* Kroetsch comments that "[t]he alphabet intrigues me, the sense of the absolute rigor that we have to have to learn ABCDEF. It's not like numbering—it is a complete arbitrariness. One wonders how that order ever got established" (40). And yet that order, once known, is inescapable, and, although contingent, remains necessary as the means by which its arbitrariness is revealed.

It is through Liebhaber's failures, and his illusion of success in the end, that the novel manages to twist away from systems long enough to show that an outside exists, even if it cannot be represented. Tiefensee's reading fails to account for the difference between Liebhaber and the novel, and the difference of both to their author, Kroetsch. She writes, "[t]hrough Liebhaber, *Crow* is a working out of the dialectic to which Kroetsch is dedicated, a process performed by the power of the negative" (124). However, the novel can only be said to work out its dialectic when one misrecognizes Liebhaber as the centre, standing in for the novel and its author. Certainly this possibility is held out. Certainly this is the position Liebhaber desires, as he is, "set on gaining a victory over death" (163). Nevertheless, excess persists. It is, of course, true that the novel uses the same linguistic system to represent Liebhaber's position within systems, and, as such, is within that system itself and does not, and cannot, escape it. It is possible, though, as we will see, to use that system to call attention to its outside, even though this strategy remains complicit. To refuse this complicity, though, is to give up on representation entirely and remain silent, which is to accept a defined, subordinate, position within the system, to yield to it.

The way in which the novel exposes the excess of systems is evident when Liebhaber officiates a hockey game: "Liebhaber, as referee, removed yet always there, watched the disputes [. . .] The rougher the game became, the clearer his vision. He was some kind of arbitrator, the civilizing man. He liked that. The civilizing man: at the center, and yet uninvolved" (62). Tiefensee claims that it is in this role that he is "depicted most typically" (120) in his desire to "embrace mankind" (*Crow* 62). I think that she is quite right about this, but it is a desire that does not succeed. Liebhaber convinces himself it is successful, but continued excess escapes his grasp. When the game degenerates into a brawl with "[m]uch of the population of Big Indian [. . .] on the ice, kicking, flailing, bashing, screaming, crying, jerking, beating" (63), we read,

> Liebhaber was the hero. He walked over to a box on a post by the skating rink shack and turned out the lights. He was able, that night, single-handedly, to assert order. After he turned on the lights he gave eighteen penalties and called the remaining six players to a face-off at center ice. Only three people had to go to hospital. The game was finished without further incident, the Braves winning by a score of three to two. (63)

This "success" results in Liebhaber being temporarily elevated to a position of prominence in the community: "[f]or the next few weeks, Liebhaber settled all differences" (63). However, when he is told that Gladys became pregnant by "[e]verybody" (65) during the brawl, a "further incident" that the narrator initially lets pass unmentioned, he becomes "outraged" with "the deceit of the world" (65). His belief in his imposed order is revealed as a lie.

Similarly, when Liebhaber thinks he is going to die, trapped under the hull of his overturned boat, which he is building to survive the flood he has predicted is coming (another attempt to control excess through work), he thinks he has found an escape from narrative through narrative. Again, this happens when he is isolated from others:

> trapped in the absolute darkness under the boat, trapped into death, [he] hit on the realization that he had escaped. He hung onto a rib, in the cold water, trying to remember a life he hadn't lived. Without Gutenberg's curse; yes, that was it; without Gutenberg and moveable type, he would have lived another life. And finally he was free of Gutenberg. I *perish,* he imagined, *but only in a dream.* No, that wouldn't do for an opening. Yes, he was writing his own story, at last. He tried again, working with furious intent: *Enough would be enough.* He liked that. He would account for events, announce the presence of design, under the apparent chaos. *Enough.* That one, sufficient word, so neatly balanced against itself. He had no idea how long he'd been under the hull. Perhaps it was night now. Surely someone would miss him. All night he would set type; everything set, everything forgotten. But now he had escaped; he had recovered the night, and dream, and memory. He would compose a novel one sentence long, a novel that anyone could memorize. *You in my arms.* Yes, that would do it. He tested for revision, recited the four words..." (146)

His moment of transcendence is interrupted by the black crow, apparently pecking on the hull, and this interruption is followed by silence. Despite the claim that "he had escaped" and "recovered the night, and dream, and memory" the sacred "memory of the past" that Gutenberg had made irrelevant, we read, "Liebhaber needed another sentence" (146). His narrative does not become, never quite becomes, myth, never quite becomes self-sufficient. He ends up pleading with the crow he thinks is there only to have his promises—"I'll gather food for you. Grasshoppers and butterflies wet with dew [. . .]" (146)—met with "[s]ilence. Silence and only silence" (146). The crow does not respond to Liebhaber's attempt to establish their relation as one of economic exchange. Rather, their relationship exceeds Liebhaber's attempts to possess it, as it only exists in sharing. His complete and self-sufficient myth of completion, unity, and control—"You *in* my *arms*"—is interrupted. His myth of possession, of enclosing the other in an embrace, always needs another sentence; the closure is deferred.[45] This interruption of the promised systematic closure is the role of the crow throughout the novel.

What the Crow Interrupted

The coherence of diversity around something called "community" suggests the development of myth, a unifying identification that serves to orient 'us' (those included by the myth) as "we" struggle to make sense of the apparent chaos of life, "the silence of the world, the failure of the world to announce meaning" (Kroetsch, *Lovely* 64). However, identification with such unifying stories is necessary. Such a centre will, necessarily, "call[] forth its own deconstruction" (Angus, *(Dis)Figurations* 239), but needs to be reconstructed in the interplay between particular and universal. Tiefensee argues that, in *Crow*, "Voice is so highly privileged that one might say he [Kroetsch] accords it the governing role in the novel" (116), but this voice is repeatedly interrupted and ironized. Its centrality is continually disrupted and reconfigured:

Irony is not sufficient in itself—"the formula for irony [. . .] is fundamentally the same as the formula for the identity of myth" (Nancy, *Inoperative* 61)—but is important for what it makes possible. If "Voice" is governing the novel, it does a very poor job, as ungovernable elements proliferate, and these ungovernable elements appear as a result of the interruption of that "communal" voice; they speak as "the very voice of interruption" (Nancy 62). The moment of unconditional community, beyond subject and object, is not made possible by the unification that is the work of individuals building "communities," but is revealed by the interruption of that unification. The crow is one means by which this unity of voice is disrupted:

> in the interruption there is nothing new to be heard, there is no new myth breaking through; it is the old story one seems to hear. When a voice, or music, is suddenly interrupted, one hears just at that instant something else, a mixture of various silences and noises that had been covered over by the sound, but in this something else one hears again the voice or the music that has become in a way the voice or the music of its own interruption: a kind of echo, but one that does not repeat that of which it is the reverberation. (Nancy, *Inoperative* 62)

The crow interrupts, disturbs, disrupts the men's attempts at ordering/controlling through systems, by questioning, doubting, interjecting, repeating. The "community" "years later" attempts to appropriate what the crow says for "its" own purposes and thus begin a new myth, but this appropriation always fails to fully deal with the excess that appears as a result of the interruption. In the end, Liebhaber only achieves his apparent "success" in transcending death through a failure to hear what the crow says, and his apparent triumph is revealed as an illusion if we understand, given the narrator's irony, "what the crow said."

The "black crow" (the redundant adjective seeking to describe and thereby contain the inexplicable in language) is, perhaps, the spokesperson of silence. JG, the perfectly handsome silent child of Tiddy Lang and Gus Liebhaber and John Skandl (his paternity pointing to excess and indeterminacy), walks only in figure-eights (the symbol of infinity) and "there were those who insisted that the black crow sometimes spoke on behalf of JG" (56). Whether or not this is the case, and the radical indeterminacy of causality is necessary to the book's complicit resistance to the temptation of meaning, the crow's interruptions show the pointlessness of men's endeavours. The crow reveals the impossibility of language enclosing the infinite, and, thus, if it speaks on behalf of JG, it does so as the interruption of the infinite. The crow, if it is speaking for the infinite absence that JG stands for, does so not as invisible ventriloquist but as mediator. He is not able to present the infinite, to speak for the absence that JG embodies, but is able to interrupt claims of totality and thereby allow the consideration of the infinite, to allow something else to be heard in addition to "the old story," an echo, a reverberation. While Kroetsch says elsewhere that the Canadian artist represents "the presence of absence" (*Lovely* 38), this presence (of absence) is represented in both of the senses described by Spivak: it is simultaneously revealed and mystified, presented and interpreted (256). Tiefensee claims that "[t]he Canadian ingenuity that Kroetsch repeatedly describes is a talent for dialectical thinking through which we, or our artists for us, can use every disadvantage, every lack or absence, to speak our Presence as a self-sufficient, self-identical people" (79). However, this speaking, in *Crow* at least, does not achieve

Presence, but calls attention to absence. JG does not speak, and the crow's speaking for him does not synthesize this absence into presence but calls attention to the irreducible other that the men attempt to ignore.

The first time the crow speaks, it berates Liebhaber—"the novel's central character [. . .] the shard who represents all men" (Tiefensee 121) as metonym in Kroetsch's "archaeological" view—who has been "explaining things to the silent, attentive bird" (56). Liebhaber has been watching the beautiful Vera Lang and, the narrator claims, "had a few statements he wanted to make about vanity and desire" (56). He begins by saying, "[t]he whole country is bitched" (56). He never finishes making his statements. He is interrupted by the crow. The opening generalization, nonetheless, about "the whole country," suggests something of the level of abstraction on which his thought is operating. He does not speak about his own vanity and desire (or even that of Vera), but makes an assertion about "the whole country." The crow interrupts with, "Liebhaber, you don't know your ass from your elbow. You are a *Dumbkopf* beyond my worst expectations" (56). The crow goes on to suggest that Liebhaber should attempt suicide. Indeed, to one extent the entire novel is about the acceptance of death, and the crow's apparent reappearance during Liebhaber's apparent achievement of this feat again disrupts the claim of success: "Liebhaber is happy. He cannot remember anything [. . .] Liebhaber is happy. After all, he is only dying" (195). His happiness is connected to an absolute forgetting, but the crow, "talking, not listening, croaking endlessly on" (195), continues to interrupt, continues to prevent the "old story" of the transcendent hero from attaining unity. More to the point here, though, is a similar disruption of Liebhaber's totalizing narrative about "the whole world" by the crow's assertion of Liebhaber's ignorance and highlighting of his mortality. The crow limits Liebhaber's universalizing impulse. While Liebhaber is on a quest to overcome death—"I'm not going to die" (14)—the crow points out that death remains an excess, perhaps *the* excess, that human systems are not able to incorporate. As such, the crow reveals community: "[a] community is the presentation to its members of their mortal truth" (Nancy, *Inoperative* 15). The individual subject is unable to account for its own death, this can only be done through the communal sharing of mourning, the storytelling that makes meaning of the exposure of human finitude, and this inability is central to how we read the novel's conclusion. It is through stories, after the death of a member of the community, that "we" struggle to make sense of that excess. While this process, of what "people" say about the departed "years later," can become mythic, such stories remain necessary for the coherence of diversity around something called community even though such coherence will call forth its own deconstruction.

Subsequently, the crow continues to interrupt men's attempts to order the world, especially during the 151 day game of schmier that dominates the novel's middle third. This game, we are told, is started as a result of "the inadequacy of truth" (66) revealed by Gladys' pregnancy. Given this realization of the inadequacy of their attempts, especially Liebhaber's, to explain "the whole," to assert order, that their access to "truth" is inadequate to control the excess that continually persists around them, the men invade the domestic space of the Lang house and attempt to shrink the world to a manageable system with clear limits and definable rules—the card game—which they try to make absolute: "[p]laying schmier, the men separate themselves from the world they cannot control, placing themselves in a microcosm" (Wall 96). This attempt, though, like all the others, is undone through the persistence of excess that the men can neither ignore nor appropriate.

At the end of the first chapter in which schmier is played, Cathy Lang returns home, at three in the morning, to declare, "I'm in love" (72). The men "wouldn't look up from their cards" (72), refusing to acknowledge her or the reality of the world beyond the order of the card game. This repeats the earlier treatment Tiddy Lang receives when she enters the beer parlour to announce Vera's pregnancy by the bees and the men "were not letting her exist in their secret place" (13). After asserting the fact of her love again in response to Isador Heck's negation—"[t]here's no such thing as love" (72)—Cathy adds, "I'm scared shitless" (72), indicating the frightening uncertainty of something as radically indeterminate as love. Nancy argues that "[l]ove does not *complete* community [. . .] in that case it would be its work, or it would put it to work. On the contrary, love [. . .] exposes the unworking and therefore the incessant *incompletion* of community. It exposes community *at its limit*" (*Inoperative* 38). In this case, Cathy's love exposes the incompletion of the (white) men's card-playing community. The threat posed by love is subsequently dealt with by its institutionalization in marriage—"[s]omeone must take a wife" (12) is Tiddy's refrain through the novel—but even this cannot deal with it without remainder. Love reveals that an outside exists to the closed community they have constructed in the game of schmier, which the men can deal with only by denial: "[t]he men didn't believe it" (88). While Tiefensee says, "[t]hat love has little to do with the relations between men and women is admitted by the men but denied by most of the women, whose belief in male-female love is one of the means by which their subservience is maintained" (128), this only repeats the logic she is critiquing. Love as myth that maintains female subservience simply inverts the binary which posits love as the transcendent term. Instead of love leading to freedom, it leads to repression. Thinking "love" in undecidability requires both logics to operate at once. "Love" is used to maintain female subordination, but also escapes that systematization. "Love" exists within a system of social and linguistic conventions, but also exposes what exceeds those conventions.

It is significant in this regard that Cathy is in love with the Cree Joe Lightning. Joe refuses to join the game of schmier—"[i]t was the first time ever that a sane, adult male had refused to join the game" (105)—and is verbally assaulted by Liebhaber as a result. He says, "[d]amn drunk Indians" (105). Later, during the War with the Sky, Joe again refuses to join the (white, male) community—"[h]e was the descendant of warriors; he knew when not to fight" (137) and "he believed in the union of the elements" (139)—in its self-destructive attempts to exert control. Joe, as Indian, remains, with the women, an other to the (white) men's attempts to control the world. Even though Joe may be appropriated by Liebhaber's quest in the end, as he is the only one who helps Liebhaber build his boat, and even though he may succumb to the desire for knowledge when he attempts to learn "the sky's own secret" (139) by wrestling an eagle, indigenous belonging remains an unappropriated excess in the novel.

The name of the town stands for its inhabitants, but it also contains the trace of the "nameless Cree buffalo hunter" (175) after whom the town is named. This naming after a nameless other suggests the persistent trace of the historical particularity that preceded the building of the (white) community. Cathy's declaration of love, even though it does not end the schmier game, interrupts it long enough for the reader to recognize some of the outsides that the game is denying, some of the sacrifices the players are making for the illusion of a unified and coherent world.

This outside intrudes again when Vera comes to tell the players that Skandl has returned, but crashed his plane. Liebhaber asserts that "[i]t's a rumor. A dirty lie. It's a trap to make us surrender" (108). When Vera asks, "[s]urrender *what*?" he shouts, "[t]he world" (108). The narrator claims that he "was confused" (108), but it is precisely the self-enclosed, all-male, world of the schmier game that he is defending, however illogically, and the death of Skandl would question its purpose since Liebhaber has posited Skandl as the messiah whose return will justify the sacrifices the system requires, making up for all it lacks. Indeed, the narrator's statement serves to disguise this, unless the reader recognizes the necessary irony of the narration, that the card-players have conflated the world of the game with the world at large. The game finally ends when Vera's Boy, the product of Vera's excessive union with the bees, returns, and the men, in their frantic demand for "details" (117), their need to explain this event, give Tiddy an opportunity to drop "Liebhaber's deck of cards into the flames" of the stove (117).

As we have seen, the predictions of Vera's Boy lead to a new period of prosperity for the district and new attempts to control the world through work. While this is happening, "no one recognized [. . .] that a war was breaking out between the sky and the earth" (119). The series of deaths by falling—Skandl's, Droniuk's, O'Holleran's—that structures this section culminates with JG attempting to imitate the black crow and "step directly into the sky" (131). However,

> JG's ascent and fall, his motion based on 'simple knowing' (147), is also opposed to the quests of other men, so driven by reason, action and meaning. Thus, on the

> one hand, we have pre-linguistic silence and unthinking motion; on the other, we have noisy codified silence and purposeful questing. A binary structure. Feminine: masculine. The irony, of course, is that both positions produce exactly the same results: silence and death. (Jackman)

It seems significant, though, that immediately following JG's death the crow leaves. The crow, which served to interrupt masculine totalizing quests and open them to otherness, flies away.

Soon after this departure the men begin to quote the crow as an authority (135). This is done in new attempts to order the world, to create myth, rather than to interrupt it. The men seek to appropriate "what the crow said" for their own community-building work. The fact is that "[t]he crow's speech parodies such rigid systematic *langue* and makes of it another kind of silence. As Robert Lecker writes, the crow really says 'very little.' And in the emptiness lies the parody" (Jackman). That is to say that the men's attempts, and those of readers seeking to "explain" the novel, to order the world, are founded on an emptiness: the arbitrariness of all language and the crow's series of expletives. Lecker suggests that

> to read *Crow* we must enter into its spirit of play and realize that it is possible to read without an end or message in mind. This spirit is suggested by the title itself [. . .] The book is named after an event of remote importance to the story. In short, the title tells us that in these pages we will not find what we set out to find. (105)

That, of course, depends on what one "sets out to find," and what the crow said is only of "remote importance" if we accept the traditional binary that privileges meaning over meaninglessness. Refusing the hierarchy of "realism" over "magic," the novel also refuses "meaning" over "meaninglessness." This refusal remains incomplete, though, because it occurs through language, which cannot not make meaning. The "meaning" of the novel is in the meaninglessness of what the crow said, the revelation of meaninglessness by what the crow said, a revelation that depends on novelistic conventions and the signification of language. One assumes that a title indicates something of central importance; when what the title refers to refuses to provide conventional "meaning" the convention is questioned; still, that questioning depends on knowledge of the convention, and, insofar as in that questioning of conventions the novel has its meaning, the questioning shows continuing reliance on conventions. Wall argues that "[i]t is only with respect to 'what the crow said' that we begin to suspect that the attribution of meaning and causality is a desperate and foolish effort" (91). This desperate and foolish act is the human work of myth-making; it is carried out by the men in the novel and the irony is revealed by the "communal" narrator, who, despite all the irony, cannot avoid complicity with traditional hierarchies.

The Conclusion: Silence, Love, and Death

The novel ends with an image of communion between lovers. Tiddy and Liebhaber, "lay, together, in the naked circle of everything" (193). However, this communion is not the completion of community, the achievement of presence, despite the narrator's representation of it. Liebhaber, we are told, brought about the flood that ended the war with the sky by using Vera's bees, to "fertilize the barren sky" (163), but his desire for recognition remains deferred:

> people, years later; years later they will say: against all knowledge, he fired the cannon. He fired the cannon, after all; it was he who dared. He took the bees. He pumped them into the sky itself, rammed them into the sky's night, into the sky's blue breaking. At the mere command of the merest need. He knocked them high, shot them into the one androgynous moment of heaven and earth. He spent the queens into their myriad selves; he, the first and final male, horny to die. (193)

The claim of transcendence through sexualized work is not the crucial aspect; rather, it is the outside that is called forth by it. Whereas the novel opens with, "[p]eople, years later, blamed"—a description, repeated several times throughout the novel, of how, in the future, excessive events from the past are fixed by story—here, at the end of the novel, there is a deferral into the future that remains deferred. We are told that "years later they *will say*." The change from past to future opens a gap in the text, expressing expectation for a story to come that will explain Liebhaber's actions. Despite the suggestion of completion in "first and final male" any recognition as such depends on other people and what they say about the event. Although Tiddy may be "living for the moment" (190, 191), and Liebhaber "cannot remember anything" (195), the narrative remains oriented toward the future and trusts its potential for fixing the past in the senses of correcting its errors, securing in place, and neutering (eliminating its dangerous productivity). And, as the novel has repeatedly shown, any such story that claims to contain and explain past excesses creates new ones and calls forth its own deconstruction.

Liebhaber, throughout the novel, seeks to reestablish patriarchal control over the uncontrolled Lang women and all the men who have been subordinated to Tiddy by "having her." As Tiefensee argues, "[t]he men who had loved Tiddy are all connected by their proximity to horses, by their right to men's territory. And Tiddy 'takes in' all men, making them available to Liebhaber through his taking of her, as she calls him 'Child. Husband. Son. Brother. Old Man. Friend. Helper. Enemy. Lover'" (121). While this does suggest that "Liebhaber is on the way to becoming the transcendental signified" (122), he is only able to achieve the illusion of a successful transcendence by ignoring the excess that persists. His inability to "remember anything" (195) suggests an absolute acceptance of Gutenberg's galaxy (as Marshall McLuhan had it) in which the past is fixed through print and there are no marginal spaces from which the silenced others can speak. This is to accept the narrator's representation of events as complete and ignore both Old Lady Lang, whose presence, with her "ball of sorrow," exceeds the novel's explanatory frame, and the crow, which must go unheard to enable the myth that Liebhaber has finally resolved his own mortality.

Nancy argues that "[d]eath irremediably exceeds the resources of a metaphysics of the subject" (*Inoperative* 14). Significantly, it is the narrator who tells us that "Liebhaber is happy. After all, he is only dying" (195). Critics tend to read this as a straightforward presentation of Liebhaber's thoughts: since we know that the narrator is, in fact, *representing* events (and representing them ironically) this assertion should be read differently. It should be open to the possibility of interested interpretation underlying the representation. A subject cannot represent its own death. Liebhaber is not the novel, and, by suggesting that he is, Tiefensee is performing the same reduction for which she critiques Kroetsch. Literature reveals excess, and, instead of discussing this excess, Tiefensee's exclusive focus on Kroetsch's complicity with metaphysics attempts to fix his writing in the realm of myth.

This can be seen in her discussion of love. She claims in a footnote that "[i]t is of interest in regard to our inveterate habit of disguising the metaphysical gesture of reappropriation by clothing it in sentimentally reassuring and humanistic terms such as 'love'" (177). She continues,

> to turn oneself into one's own other is the negation through which the self reduces the other to a reflection of itself, in order that the other may be subsumed within the supposedly complete Self. How this violence can be called love is certainly paradoxical—and one of the fictions by which we live—and it is made possible by the necessity with which metaphysics effaces its own gestures, making us blind to our familiar and supposedly natural habits of thought. (177)

Such an assertion suggests that "love" is impossible, that it is only ever the "false consciousness" of bourgeois subjectivity trying to explain the world to itself as knowable, to reduce love to an object that can be appropriated by the self as agential subject: such a reduction is never accomplished without remainder. While love is instrumentalized as an economic exchange by which wealth is consolidated (in marriage) and the labour supply reproduced, it also operates according to another logic; it twists away from systematic closure that seeks to make it yield; while Liebhaber symbolically defeats all of his rivals, all the previous men who have "had" Tiddy, by having her himself, he also reveals the necessity of love. As Derrida might say, love is impossible, in one sense, and it is precisely this impossibility that makes love necessary, which makes it necessary to think love beyond the subject-object relation.[46] Love is not (only) the completion of the Self, but (also) the exposure of the self as incomplete. As Nancy writes, "love is missing from the very place where this dialectical law operates [. . .] And there is nothing dialectical about this loss or this 'lack': it is not a contradiction, it is not made to be sublated or resorbed" (*Inoperative* 88). Further, "[t]he *exposed* being is perhaps also the subject of a dialectical process, but what is exposed, what makes it exposed, is that it is not completed by this process, and it 'incompletes itself' to the outside, it is presented, offered to something that is not it nor its proper becoming" (*Inoperative* 89). Liebhaber may be this subject of a dialectical process, as Tiefensee has it, but she is wrong to suggest that Liebhaber completes his transcendence through this process. Tiefensee is right to note that, there is "no mention of love throughout the night-long 'love-making'" (122) of Liebhaber and Tiddy, but, even though she claims, "that his [Liebhaber's] quest for immortality succeeds" (122) through this love-making, this love-making in fact serves to allow its outside to appear, to expose the fact that "love" is missing from the place where this dialectical law operates. It shows that love is not a product to be "made," is not within the realm of work.

The bees that begin entering the room during this love-making (191) suggest the continuation of the excess that the novel marks in its beginning and that the "community" attempts to contain through story. In the morning, after the night of "love-making" "Liebhaber, with the slow brush of his tongue, resists the bees" (194). His resistance of excess continues; his resistance of an order not of his making continues; his resistance to the exposure of the incompletion revealed through love continues. Nevertheless, that which is outside his dialectical appropriations continues to reveal itself; he continues to be exposed to his outside, and though he may remain blind to it, though readers may remain blind to it when reading from within the same dominant story that Liebhaber inhabits, it remains available, waiting to deconstruct that story.

While Wall argues that "[t]he acceptance of death at the novel's close frees Liebhaber from the tyrannies that have so preoccupied him: he admits that Gutenberg is only a scribe and that the agent of tyranny is not print or language, but the way they are inscribed, with believed absolutism, by humans" (102), this is another inscription of absolutism. To suggest that freedom can be achieved by changing the ways in which print and language are inscribed by humans is to fail to recognize that the world is not of our making, and that, as Liebhaber's earlier struggles make plain, language inscribes us even as we inscribe it. The acceptance of death only has meaning insofar as it is represented for the reader, through language, in the novel; the narrator controls our access to what the characters do. At the same time, this apparent acceptance of death is questioned by the continued presence (absence) of the crow. Thomas argues that

> though he [Liebhaber] reaches Tiddy in the end, it is at the expense of language, memory, and the whole struggle to *signify* life. 'Liebhaber is happy. He cannot remember anything' (p. 217). For Tiddy, he is 'like a little boy' (p.214). Caught between Gutenberg's curse and Tiddy's solace, Liebhaber sleeps at last, freed from the compulsion to create a significant story, resting silently in what we may presume is truth. (*RK and His Works* 47)

But this truth cannot be represented. These two readings suggest the indeterminacy of our final image of Liebhaber: he is free from the tyrannous compulsion to create a significant story, but, in attaining this freedom, has become part of a significant story. However, it is not with Liebhaber and this silence that the novel concludes. If Liebhaber has achieved the transcendence of truth, it is in the unrepresentable silence of death, the limit of the subject at which it depends on the community for its existence, where it ceases to be a subject, cannot represent this "truth" to itself or others and depends on others to represent whatever they can access of this truth to themselves.

Nancy argues that "myth relentlessly announces the passing of the limit, the communion, the immanence or the confusion. Writing, on the other hand, or 'literature,' inscribes the sharing: the limit marks the advent of singularity, and its withdrawal" (*Inoperative* 78). Thus Liebhaber seems to found a myth in his belief in his own self-presence, but the novel inscribes the sharing that continues at the limit of singularity. Liebhaber has achieved his myth only by ignoring the excess that continues to surround him. He is able to accept his mortality and thereby achieve (apparent) immortality only by ignoring/failing to hear what the crow says in the end—"[t]he crow is outside the bedroom window. It is talking, not listening, croaking endlessly on. Liebhaber cannot quite understand what the crow is saying" (195). As Dorscht argues, though, "like Liebhaber, we cannot quite understand what the crow said" (79), and, like him, and Kroetsch, we are tempted to make meaning based on what we think we know and despite what we do not; we are tempted to fill in the gaps of what we do not know, to pass the limits established by the text. Indeed, it is impossible not to make meaning in this way. Even the attempt to remain silent about what we do not know creates meaning. It is still necessary to speak toward silence, and this complicit struggle, which is both the author's and the reader's, is what Kroetsch explores in *Crow*.

Liebhaber, in his final happiness, has excluded the crow and ignores the lives of Tiddy's mother, daughters, and granddaughters that persist around him: "life continues in its forms of loneliness, sensuality, and hope, providing no guarantee against overreaching and pain, but offering, in thematic terms, the process of living as a defense against the temptation of meaning, and offering as well the engaging complexities of a text which refutes reductive summaries in its play of possibilities" (Edwards 106). Rita is writing; Rose is burying a robin; Old Lady Lang is breaking the sprouts of last year's potatoes again; "Anna Marie picks up a comb" (194); Gladys masturbates in the barn; Terry rejoices because Vera's death means she will get Vera's room; Terry and Daryl Dish stand at the window; Cathy is bringing the cows in and "hoping that Joe Lightning will fall into her arms" (195). Even though "Cathy is the normal one" (195) and ending with her suggests "a sense in which the 'natural' has been restored" (Dorscht 79), the "natural" remains open to the coming of the other. Our "natural" or normal modes of thought remain dependent on some absent other.

The title, then, achieves its (non)meaning in the end, and Tiefensee's critique comes undone through the conflation of Liebhaber with the novel in her claim that the novel achieves its work *through* Liebhaber, that "Kroetsch's male literature still says that we are on quests and that the successful hero is male" (125). Rather, the unsuccessful hero is male: Liebhaber's work is unworked through the novel and its exposure of the continuation of the excessive others of white men. The exposure of this continuation occurs through irony and love. The quest, a mythic form, is exhausted, and is only appropriate now for what can be glimpsed in its interruption.[47] Its conventions are useful for revealing this interruption, even though such "use" is inevitably complicit. What the crow said is meaningless, or, at least, its meaning escapes Liebhaber's apparent transcendence, and its inscription by the novel. Through attention to meaninglessness the system of meaning is interrupted and prevented from achieving its oppressive closure. It is only in the struggle, the mélée, the game, that we can reach toward coherence even as that reaching deconstructs itself.

Chapter Three: Natives, Nature, the Nisei, and the Nation: Abject Belonging in *Obasan*

> [. . .] although the terms used in discussing ethnicity have changed, it would be safe to argue that minoritarian Canadians still remain Other to the national imaginary. In the realm of media discourse, they continue to be defined in terms of a counternarrative that now changes, now erodes, what Canadian identity is presumed to mean.
>
> —*Smaro Kamboureli*, Scandalous Bodies (2000).

> In many ways, home is an image for the power of stories. With both, we need to live in them if they are to take hold, and we need to stand back from them if we are to understand their power. But we do need them; when we don't have them, we become filled with a deep sorrow.
>
> —*J. Edward Chamberlin*, If This is Your Land, Where are Your Stories? (2003).

The proliferation of critical discourse around Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* might be understood as reflecting a diversity of opinion about the power of an idea of home and the role of stories in creating that idea. Indeed, the novel can be read as a struggle to find a new story for Japanese Canadians (JCs) and to work through the sorrow at their exile from a previous story. However, insofar as this new story claiming Japanese Canadian belonging continues to be structured in relation to a national narrative, it is repeatedly unworked in the novel: it remains Other. This unworking also reveals what remains unaccounted for in that national narrative: it exposes both the original homelessness of those who claim absolute belonging and the belonging of those forced into homelessness. Megumi Naomi Nakane's narrative struggles to reconcile the stories she has inherited and grown up in with the narrative of Canadian identity that constructs her as Other. It does this by forging equivalences with other groups marginalized by the national imaginary while at the same time foregrounding the acts of interpretation on which these acts of speaking for are founded. She attempts to retain particular difference even while establishing equivalences, and, in the process of this movement, the novel models a new story of belonging, one that remains vulnerable in its incompletion.[48] By focusing on both historical particularities and the process of history-making, Kogawa is able to disrupt myths of the nation as an "imagined political community" (Anderson 6) by revealing what remains outside those myths without simply inverting the binary of self and other, without letting the outside become established as a new inside, a new basis for a myth of completion.

History, Discourse, Myth

History is both a foundation for myths and a way of exposing their outsides. Donald C. Goellnicht is right to criticize the too common critical reception of Kogawa's novel as, "correcting history, [. . .] revealing what 'really' happened, [. . .] resurrecting a piece of Canada's heritage [and] setting the record straight" (287). In fact, this "misses a major point of Kogawa's fiction: that her text problematizes the very act of reconstructing history by comparing it to the process of writing fiction" (Goellnicht 287). The record can never be "straight" and history is not inherently progressive,[49] proceeding according to a dialectical synthesis in which nothing of importance is left out.[50] Indeed, the novel struggles to negotiate a position that maintains both what is good in the modern liberal story of progress and the good excluded by it, that of Obasan's "traditional" worldview. Naomi is in search of a story that has room for human agency in making history and accepts an idea of limit to that agency. She is caught between her desire to be a speaking subject, to displace the myths that have objectified her throughout her life by speaking back to them, and to avoid repeating the logic of that objectification, the logic of objective representational discourse. To do this, she has recourse to the idea of a natural order not of human making and her Obasan's passive acceptance of what is beyond one's control.[51]. However, through the influence of her Aunt Emily, she is also shown the ease with which such a view enables one group's objectification by another. The paradox lies in the fact that becoming a speaking subject requires adopting, at least to some extent, the worldview of the dominant society in which humans are in control of history as a progressive narrative. This narrative is what enabled and justified the atrocities of World War II—the holocaust, atomic warfare, and the internment of JCs. Naomi's solution to this problem is to maintain a notion of a universal order, but one that cannot be represented, known, or possessed in discourse: it can only be glimpsed at the limits of discourse. As Cheryl Lousley suggests, "while there might be an ontological category 'nature,' a physical reality outside our knowledge system, we can only access and know this nature through social constructs, whether science or aesthetics, thus in practice there can be no separation of ontology from epistemology (i.e. what we know is shaped by how we know)" ("Home?" 340). Naomi's narrative recognizes and reveals that history is only ever a partial narrative that serves particular interests. We can see how her narrative is serving her interests, and those of JCs, in this manner, and, thus, is complicit with the techniques of dominant society. The idea of history is in critical tension in the novel, though as Naomi struggles both to speak back to a narrative that denies her particularity and to remain silent so as to avoid speaking for others as the dominant society has spoken for her. Insofar as the novel calls attention to this tension, rather than mystifying it, as myth attempts to do, it succeeds in literature's role of interrupting myth. In resisting the narrative of "truth" as objective and knowable, *Obasan* allows the gaps of the "silence that will not speak" (Kogawa proem) to appear and provide a provisional sense of unity. The gaps inscribed on her body, family, community, country, civilization—all of these particularities, that are supposed to, for Grant, lead toward the good—have been written by racist myths claiming to speak for history. The passages between these elements—body and family (fractured by Old Man Gower), family and community (fractured by internment and dispersal), community and country (fractured by the revelation of racism within the myth of liberal democracy), and country and civilization (the fracture revealed by the connection between "Canadian" actions toward Japanese Canadian citizens and the actions of Nazi Germany)—need to be remade, in narrative, if Naomi is to find even a provisional belonging in this world.

Part of the novel's strategy in seeking this position is to reintroduce forgotten or repressed historical particularity into the myth of Canada as inclusive, progressive, multicultural nation. Roy Miki claims,

> [f]or the Canadian-born nisei, especially those who desired 'incorporation' into white Canada, the term 'Japanese' became a barrier to overcome [. . .] they were attracted to the prospect of finally being able to identify themselves as members of the 'Canadian' nation-family. That gesture, though, required a distancing from their 'Japanese' ancestry, from that cultural and linguistic matrix of values, represented most materially in the lives of their first generation parents, the issei. (202)

The novel explores how this narrative fails Naomi. She, a Sansei, that is third-generation, Japanese Canadian, is caught between her Nisei Aunt Emily's desire to become fully and unqualifiedly "Canadian" by correcting the nation's historical narrative that excludes her, and her Issei Ayako Obasan's maintenance of traditional "Japanese" values: acceptance, gratitude, service. Following the internment, Naomi ends up neither incorporated into the dominant white society nor any longer inhabiting "that cultural and linguistic matrix" of the isolated but apparently unified pre-war Japanese Canadian community. When the novel starts, with Naomi living in Cecil, Alberta in 1972, she has lost her community, has no Japanese Canadian friends, does not read or write Japanese, yet is still asked, "[h]ow long have you been in this country?" (7). She is unable to be "at home" in her body, in her family, in her part of the world, in her set of traditions, in her country, in her civilization.

At the same time as *Obasan* disrupts the teleological, progressivist, narrative of nationalism, it depends upon an embracing of, and speaking for, the dispossessed that is complicit with the dominant strategies of that narrative; it is in danger of inverting the dominant binaries and founding a new myth. The representation of the dispossessed, though, reveals history as a discursive construct by interrupting the national narrative of inclusiveness and revealing its outside. In exploring this tension, the novel undertakes a complex engagement with the national myths that persuaded the majority of Canadians to passively accept the injustice perpetrated against a minority group, and that continue to enable injustices to be accepted. These myths are the dominant myths of North America: the myths of humans as makers of history, the modern liberal belief in progress through rational technological domination of human and non-human nature, the justification of the sacrifice of particularity in the name of "equality." The novel shows how Naomi struggles to negotiate a viable subject position in a country that repeatedly tells stories that exclude her particularities. One way in which Naomi does this is by analogy with other excluded and abjected groups. North American Natives are one such group. In speaking for Native peoples, though, the novel flirts with the discursive strategies it seeks to expose as particularities claiming to be universals.

Constructing Indigeneity

Naomi's narrative begins, in chapter one—after a Biblical epigraph, an author's note and dedication, and a proem (and these preliminaries mark an important excess to the novel proper's recounting of Naomi's personal journey of discovery and healing)—in a coulee outside Granton Alberta, where Naomi makes a connection between Natives and JCs. Naomi has come with her Uncle, Isamu, on their yearly pilgrimage to this coulee. Although Naomi does not (consciously)[52] know it, this trip commemorates her mother's death, which, she will eventually learn, occurred following the Allies' dropping of the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki, Japan on August 9, 1945 (Kogawa 260). On this, their eighteenth annual, trip Naomi thinks, "Uncle could be Chief Sitting Bull squatting here. He has the same prairie-baked skin, the deep brown furrows like dry river beds creasing his cheeks. All he needs is a feather headdress, and he would be perfect for a picture-postcard—'Indian Chief from Canadian Prairie'—souvenir of Alberta, made in Japan" (2). This analogy appropriates indigenous belonging for JCs, but also, as we will see, maintains difference while creating a basis for resistance to the mythic representations of indigenes as "natural" by the dominant culture. This disruption of representations of Natives provides, by analogy, a way for the text to show the constructed nature of representations of JCs.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue that the bourgeoisie "*uses* the whole world as its theatre in a particularly instrumental fashion, the very subjects which it politically excludes becoming exotic costumes which it assumes in order to play out the disorders of its own identity" (200). This appropriation of the politically excluded is seen in the novel's representation of the treatment of JCs when, for example, Mr. Barker, visiting Obasan and Naomi to express sympathy over Isamu's death, laments the treatment of "our Japanese" (247). This "speaking for" the "Japanese" is one technique of modern liberal humanism, one way of representing otherness as possessed by the intelligence and explicable. Naomi, however, exposes the inadequacy of this technique of simultaneous othering and possession by repeating, to herself, the questions she has heard all her life: "How long have you been in this country? Do you like our country? You speak such good English. Do you run a café? My daughter has a darling Japanese friend. Have you ever been back to Japan?" (247).[53] "Back?" (247), she asks, wondering, incredulously, how one can return to a place one has never been.

Yet, at the same time as the novel rejects the appropriative logic of the nation, it struggles to differentiate Japanese Canadian identity and avoid assimilation, but also to assert the belonging of JCs within a Canadian national identity, to move between an identification with a particular body and a particular family to an identification with "this part of the world" and "this country." It struggles to tell a Japanese Canadian story that insists on both "Japanese" and "Canadian" identifications simultaneously. To do this, it repeats a typical instrumentalization of Native identity, becoming complicit with the logic it is critiquing, but it does so with a difference.

As Terry Goldie argues, the nature of Canadians' presence in Canada is self-contradictory: "[t]he white Canadian looks at the Indian. The Indian is Other and therefore alien. But the Indian is indigenous and therefore cannot be alien. So the

Canadian must be alien. But how can the Canadian be alien within Canada?" (12). This leads, on the one hand, to a fear of Natives, but, on the other, to a temptation to appropriate their belonging. *Obasan* repeatedly invokes Native belonging and identity and suggests equivalences between Native and Japanese Canadian experiences in an attempt to manage the contradictions of identity and speak out of silenced histories. *Obasan*, then, as a narrative of Japanese Canadian resistance to the dominant Anglo-Canadian, "bourgeois," instrumentalization of Japanese Canadian identity, is complicit with the assumption of the politically excluded exotic described by Stallybrass and White, but this complicity is necessary to achieving the novel's resistance. It is different from that performed by bourgeois subjects' myth-making: *Obasan* reveals its construction rather than disguising it, and, in revealing this, it also reveals the constructedness of the dominant ideology: the novel points to the contradictions and excesses in white Canadians' claims of belonging.

The comparison between Uncle and Sitting Bull implies indigeneity for JCs on par with that of Natives. Lousley explains that "[t]his passage simultaneously *naturalizes* the presence of the Japanese Canadian on the prairie by making him, quite literally, 'native' and *denaturalizes* the category of 'race' on which the historical dispossession and relocation of both the First Nations and JCs was based" ("Home?" 337). Uncle Sam *as* Sitting Bull possesses a belonging that precedes the national construct of Canada and its colonial history, but this belonging is disrupted by that history. He could be a "souvenir," a remembrance, of what Alberta was, but this image is relegated to the past. At the same time this image is divided in its origins; although "of" Alberta it was "made in Japan." A difference between Isamu and Sitting Bull is maintained regarding where each was "made." (Sitting Bull is also not "of" Alberta, but "of" a nomadic tribal society with its own understanding of place that was displaced by settler/invaders who then created "Alberta" as a geo-political entity). Arnold E. Davidson notes that "[t]he coulee engraves loss on the prairie and that engraving is reinscribed in Uncle's face, making him a version of Sitting Bull, who also squatted in Canada but was not allowed a real home there" (*Coyote* 30). Thus the shared belonging is also a shared homelessness, a shared exile.

For Frank Davey,

> [t]he images given the coulee—ancient, natural, aboriginal—announce a movement throughout the text to 'naturalize' the JCs by associating them with organic signs familiar to readers of Western literature: the North American native, the natural landscape that transcends time and politics, the Wordsworthian refuge that compensates for social cruelties. (105)

While the solace provided by nature does inhere in this scene and suggest the comfort of a cosmic order beyond the chaos of human history, the image is repeatedly overwritten by this history. The figure of Sitting Bull is suggestive of the kind of "natural" belonging Davey suggests, given the traditional representational associations of indigenes created by and for the dominant culture, but the reader of *Obasan* should not let the historical particularity of Sitting Bull go unnoticed. The disruption of such a natural order always already exists in the image of the indigene given the colonial history of North America. Sitting Bull, and the Sioux, escaped to Canada after defeating Custer at the Little Big Horn only to be denied food and eventually forced to surrender to U.S. troops. Thus, his residence in the District of Assiniboia (which would later be divided between Alberta and

Saskatchewan) was not one of "natural belonging" but, like Isamu's, forced exile. These "organic signs" are shown to be constructed in discourse, as the novel's conclusion reveals that the trips to the coulee are in remembrance of Naomi's mother's death following the bombing of Nagasaki (the result of the human ideology of progress reaching the "atomic age") and occur within time and politics, not outside them. History, in this example, as it does throughout the novel, interrupts myth when its multiple significations are acknowledged.

Thus, while the coulee may be read as an image of natural order at the beginning of the novel, any such reading is complicated by its end. Miki argues, regarding the "Excerpt from the Memorandum sent by the Co-operative Committee on Japanese Canadians to the House and the Senate of Canada, April 1946" (Kogawa 272), that this postscript changes how the rest of the novel signifies (139). In Derrida's words, "this postscript of sorts retrospectively determines what precedes it" (*Archive* 40). That is, as we will see, what occurs in the novel after this opening scene changes the ways in which it signifies on initial reading. The revelation that the visit commemorates the death of Naomi's mother following the bombing of Nagasaki and the Memorandum's well-intentioned liberal sentiments that, nonetheless, continue to speak for JCs, show that the natural landscape does not ever completely "transcend time and politics." As Lousley puts it, "what we know is shaped by how we know," and how we know is determined by the particularities of location—time and politics—even when narratives generated out of those particularities claim to be transcendent and universal.

In the end, when Naomi finally learns how her mother died, she returns to a comparison with Natives to explain the psychological journey she has made. The suffering she has endured, which "cannot speak," finds expression in a metaphor of the Sun Dance. Upon learning of her mother's fate, Naomi thinks of her connection with her mother in terms of both this sacred Native ceremony and the European tradition of the maypole: "[m]other, in my dreams you are a maypole. I dance with a long paper streamer in my hand. But the words of the May Day song are words of distress. The unknown is a hook that pierces the bone. Thongs hang down in the hot prairie air. Silence attends the long sun dance" (266). Again, the identification is double; Naomi's experience is both that of the European May Day celebration, with its roots in a variety of Germanic, Gaelic, and Celtic festivals, and an indigenous North American ceremony. Both are ceremonies of renewal and archetypal timeless repetition (the return of spring, the return of the sun), both involve dancing around a pole and singing, while the Sun Dance, at least, involves dreams and visions. While the "unknown" remains painful for her, she is no longer seeking answers for her questions through rational means but submitting herself, metaphorically, to a process of suffering, accepting her mother's silence, trusting that the situation will be "enlightened by love" when she acknowledges the limits of her intelligence to master the situation and accepts her own vulnerability.[54]

The contrast between this "use" of indigeneity and that undertaken by the dominant culture is made apparent through the bitter irony of the "Tillicum Club" (191), to which both Naomi and Stephen belong as children. The Tillicum Club was a real organization, a pen pal club run by the Vancouver Daily Province newspaper. Obasan uses a page of this paper, with the Tillicum Club News, to wrap "the pretty blue and white shoyu bottle" (191) as they prepare to move from Slocan to Kaslo in preparation for their "Eastern Placements" (190). In the novel, the club has "a totem-pole pin" for its badge and the slogan "Kla-How-Ya, we're all friends together" (191). "Kla-how-ya" is Chinook for "'how do you do?' or good day, good morning, good evening, or good by" (kla-how-ya).[55] The irony for Naomi, as the memories of the ideology of togetherness and equality suggested by the club are juxtaposed with the forced exile of some of its members, is that the representation does not match her lived experiences: the newspaper, which propagates the story of the "imagined community" of nation encloses the shoyu bottle. This irony is further heightened by the club's use of indigenous symbols and language to forge its apparent unity.

While a commonality is shown between Natives, nature, and JCs, difference is also maintained. The coulee is, for Isamu and Naomi, both a reference of origins and a reminder of division from them. As Karin Quimby argues, "[t]his melding of home and identity into the landscape, a construction that recurs throughout the text, always contains within it the paradox of being a Canadian exiled upon one's own land" (266). The contradiction of the racist exclusion of citizens of Japanese origin from the category of "Canadian" is revealed through reference to Natives, who are also excluded.

Thomas King makes the same point in the opposite direction when, in "Coyote and the Enemy Aliens," he tells the story of Japanese Canadian internment from a Native perspective. Coyote wreaks havoc by implementing the Whitemen's plan for dispersal. After the "Enemy Aliens" have had their property confiscated and been dispersed, we read, "[y]ou know, that Billy Frank tells me, this story about the Enemy Aliens have their property taken away by Coyote and the Whitemen and get moved from their homes to someplace else *reminds me of another story*"(63, emphasis added). The colonization of Native peoples and the displacement of JCs are connected in each of these representations, casting both as acts of colonial appropriation that efface prior belonging. It is the maintenance of this prior belonging, this difference from the dominant society that, in addition to the forging of equivalences between Natives, nature, and other exclusions of the Canadian nation-state within liberal capitalism, enables Naomi, and the novel, to speak while also attending to the speech of others. Naomi struggles to make history while maintaining a concept of limits that prevents her repeating the dominance and silencing of human and non-human nature that she has suffered.

As Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe write, "there is no relation of oppression without the presence of a discursive 'exterior' from which the discourse of subordination can be interrupted. The logic of equivalence in this sense displaces the effects of some discourses towards others" (154). They go on to claim that

> [f]or the defence of the interests of the workers not to be made at the expense of the rights of women, immigrants or consumers, it is necessary to establish an equivalence between these different struggles. It is only on this condition that struggles against power become truly democratic, and that the demanding of rights is not carried out on the basis of an individualistic problematic, but in the context of respect for the rights to equality of other subordinated groups. (184)

This ethic of respect offers a potential understanding of the use of indigenous identity in *Obasan* that avoids repeating a colonizing appropriation and enables a maintenance of difference at the same time as it forges equivalences. Simply asserting equivalences is not sufficient, as it would repeat the universalizing discourse of the dominant group.

Obasan does not seek to inscribe Japanese Canadian particularity as a new universal through its use of the image of the indigene (to re-make history as "multicultural"; to remake JCs as the "model minority") regardless of how it has been appropriated since its publication.[56] As Angus argues, Laclau and Mouffe's "collection of similitudes, or equivalences, is not pregiven but constructed in the practical politics in which one and/or more of them is at issue. In each case, it is by no means self-evident that the best way to push one of these causes is by alliance with the dominated part of another social difference. Why not ally oneself with a dominant power in another discourse?" (*(Dis-)Figurations* 60). Although Robert Kroetsch has argued precisely that "[p]eople who feel invisible try to borrow visibility from those who are visible" (*Lovely* 6), this is not the method Kogawa creates for Naomi in *Obasan*. We might ask why, then, if equivalence is the goal, should one not borrow the hegemonic position as one's own to bring about such equivalence? George Grant asks this question in relation to the existence of Canada as a nation-state arguing that, "[i]f the best social order is the universal and homogenous state, then the disappearance of Canada can be understood as a step toward that order" (*Lament* 94). However, on the other hand, "[i]f the universal and homogenous state would be a tyranny, then the disappearance of even this indigenous culture can be seen as the removal of a minor barrier on the road to that tyranny" (94). While I would take issue with his use of the term "indigenous" here to describe English Canada, the point stands: the continued existence of Canada is either mere parochial foot-dragging on the road to "the end of history" or it is the defence of some good.

By analogy, in the case of *Obasan*, this is to ask why Naomi would ally her experiences with those of Natives, rather than the dominant culture, as her brother Stephen does, for example, finding his escape in the "universal" language of music. Is Japanese Canadian particularity a minor barrier to bringing about "the best social order," or is it a bulwark against tyranny? One answer, I think, is that accepting complicity with the dominant culture, borrowing their visibility, results, not in visibility, but continued invisibility, and, thus, is a concession to tyranny. Angus explains that "[w]hen a culture is sacrificed, when I must forget my own in order to pass on toward the universal, the universal remains without incarnation in my world" (*(Dis)Figurations* 78). This is shown in the character of Stephen who sacrifices everything "Japanese" in his life, including a close relationship with his family, to escape the oppression he endures as a child, but nonetheless remains unhappy: he is unstable, "a ball of mercury, unpredictable in his moods and sudden rages" (15). Angus goes on to argue that one must "address both the *justification of the particular* identity and a version of the universal that allows its *inclusion in universality* in order to restore a relation between the local here and now and the connection with humanity as such" (*(Dis-)Figurations* 78). This is the task we see Naomi struggling with in the coulee, and subsequently throughout the novel, and which Stephen fails by refusing to justify his particular identity, choosing instead to flee "to the ends of the earth" (15).

Naomi, unlike Stephen, refuses to sacrifice what remains of her particularity to the apparently universal and transparent language of those like Mr. Barker who, through that language, install their particularity as the universal. She counters such appropriations with a representation of her marginalized experience that both maintains the positive "Japanese" characteristics of Uncle and Obasan and comes from Canada while opening out to a "connection with humanity as such": Canada is, still, "this land that is like every land" (Kogawa 248). As Diana Brydon shows, Naomi "experiences herself as both Little Bear and Goldilocks, intruded upon and intruder. She can give up neither identification without giving up an integral part of her [. . .] self" ("Lament" 468). In addition to the Little Bear and Goldilocks, Naomi also identifies with "Momotaro" (58), the Japanese hero who must make his way in the world "with honour" (60). Each of these identifications forms her particularity. Angus argues that "the definition of this concept of particularity requires that one take a 'step back' with regard to one's everyday involvements in a collective identity in order to recognize that it *is* endangered, that it *should* be preserved and extended, and that this project requires that such a right be extended to *others* as well" (*(Dis-)Figurations* 84). This understanding of her particularity is what we see Naomi coming to in the novel as she moves from "the safety of invisibility" (32) to her remembering ("re-membering" (Devereux 235)) of the internment and dispersal that serves to give her a provisional position from which to rediscover a communal identification. Further, this is extended to others in *Obasan*'s representation of Natives, which, although an appropriation, nevertheless, calls attention to itself and avoids representing the equivalence as "natural," "invisible," and "given." It is a representation that remains vulnerable, does not seek to create impermeability for the speaker. Naomi constructs herself, Uncle Isamu, and Sitting Bull as a "we," but it is a "we," unlike Mr. Barker's, that calls attention to its composition rather than covering it over, and, in doing so, it exposes and disrupts the appropriative assumptions of the dominant discourse even while being complicit with that discourse. This forging of equivalences extends from that established between Japanese and Native Canadians, as dominated particularities, to the technological mastery of nature.

Weeds, Insects, Animals, and Abjection

From their confinement in "the Livestock Building at Hastings Park" (95), the internment in abandoned mining towns "carved out of the wilderness" (124), the subsequent dispersal "East of the Rockies," and the alienation experienced in the Alberta landscape, Naomi, her family, and the Japanese Canadian community are made abject. Robin Potter, following Julia Kristeva, argues that, "[a]bjection [. . .] results from an activity, event, thing, thought, or emotion that disturbs an identity, system, or order. As such, it is dependent on an implicitly or socially acceptable state of affairs. In *Obasan*, the fundamental identity construct as a Japanese Canadian is severely undermined and almost completely eliminated" (n.p.). However, this abjection is reconfigured through the forging of equivalences between the JCs and the endurance of weeds and insects—those rhizomatic beings that are capable of resisting assaults by escaping "underground" until conditions are favourable for their return. This reconfiguration is undertaken through the defence of Issei particularity even if it has no currency in the public realm. The abject position of JCs is remade in the text away from that constructed by the dominant society—as otherness, filth, revulsion, etc.—toward a model in which, "an ethics of respect can replace a denial of difference" when "[s]uch respect for the other involves an abjection of the self" (Angus, *Border* 8). That is, respect for otherness becomes a willed act—"refusing to respond violently is doing something" (Butler)—that disturbs the system, since it expects subjects to behave egocentrically, to act to ensure their own impermeability. This abjection of the self, which occurs in Naomi's meditation on the Grand Inquisitor, does not lead to a final resolution, though, as the relation does not become reciprocal. The Grand Inquisitor does not abject himself. The system continues to function, as we will see, but an outside to it has been revealed through her abjection of self.

The connection between JCs and Natives noted above is repeatedly extended to the natural world as well. Early in the novel Naomi thinks, "[s]ome of the Native children I've had in my classes over the years could almost pass for Japanese, and vice-versa. There's something in the *animal-like* shyness I recognize in the dark eyes" (2, emphasis added). These thoughts occur in the coulee of the opening scene. It is here that Naomi's "fingers tunnel through a tangle of roots till the grass stands up from [her] knuckles. [She] is a part of this small forest. Like the grass [she] search[es] the earth and the sky with a thin persistent thirst" (3). The connection established between Naomi and her uncle, as representatives of JCs, Native peoples, and the natural world, suggests an abject community of suffering established in opposition to a larger system. They form a community of difference, difference that the dominant society, and its myth, work to both appropriate and exclude.

This connection, established in the opening scene, serves to inform readings of the subsequent overwhelming recurrence of animal imagery that follows and establishes the abjection suffered by JCs at the hands of the dominant society. Emily says, JCs "are like a bunch of rabbits being chased by hounds" (97). She asserts that they are "crammed into two buildings like so many pigs" (98). This type of simile proliferates in the text, especially in Emily's diary. She writes, "[w]e are all the billygoats and nannygoats and kids—all the scapegoats to appease this blindness" (95). The people "are treated worse than livestock" (97) and her reportage is like that "of a caged bird" (97). Emily wonders if "the whites think we are a special kind of low animal" (112), and claims that after the war, having sent money to aid farmers whose land was flooded in the Fraser Valley, land that had belonged to JCs, "[w]e ended up being despised twice as much and treated like cringing dogs" (207). It is significant that the majority of these images are of domesticated animals: Naomi's shift from the domesticated to the wild, then, marks the introduction of productive resistance.

While during the war JCs suffer dehumanization at the hands of the dominant discourse, and are denied the means by which to enter into discourse—their radios are confiscated, newspapers shut down, "[a]ll cards and letters are censored" (109)—Aunt Emily, subsequently, tries to reintroduce this repressed history into the myth of Canada by focusing on the events that the narrative of nation has tried to forget.[57] As Goellnicht states, "[t]o have no access to discourse amounts to an inability to shape recorded history, so that the minority is condemned to the history formed for it by the white majority" (295). JCs are denied viable subject positions in the modern world, from which they could make their own history. Rather, they are infantilized, abjected, objectified, and treated like animals. Emily's response is to forcibly insert the Nisei into the nation. Naomi, though, finds this strategy almost equally oppressive: "questions referring to the turbulence in the past, are an unnecessary upheaval in the delicate ecology of this numb day" (48) she claims after Isamu's death and, later, wonders, "Aunt Emily, are you a surgeon cutting at my scalp with your folders and your filing cards and your insistence on knowing all?" (214). Emily's path to equality through assertive speech repeats the suffering of the internment, for Naomi, rather than allowing her to heal.

The novel, then, is not a simple journey of self-discovery leading from silence into speech,[58] from domesticated to dominant, valorizing Emily's call to "write the vision and make it plain" (32). It maintains a positive aspect to a certain type of silence and defends, to a degree, the ideal of *yasashi kokoro* embodied by Naomi's absent mother, with her "tender, kind, and thoughtful heart" (50): "[i]mplicitly, through its own story-telling, it [*Obasan*] moves from silence into voice, but paradoxically into a voicing that includes the enigma of silence. Kogawa ignores simplistic opposition between speech and silence, exploring instead the potential for creative use and abuse of power in each" (Brydon, "Lament" 466). Her mother, who is "altogether yasashi" (56), is contrasted with Mrs. Sugimoto, whose "eyes search my face. Her glance is too long. She notes my fear, invades my knowing" (64). Mrs. Sugimoto's characteristics are, as we will see, those of the Grand Inquisitor of Naomi's nightmares. Rather, then, than adopting Emily's animal imagery, which is entirely negative and oppositional, Naomi moves from comparisons of her condition with animals to ones with weeds and insects that are more complex, suggesting both exclusion and resistance.

While weeds and insects, as rhizomatic hybrids, offer an alternative to Emily's animal imagery, Naomi also resorts to animal imagery on a few occasions, mostly early in the novel. Just before, and during, the description of the sexual abuse perpetrated against her by Old Man Gower, Naomi uses animal metaphors. First, in her dream of "three beautiful oriental women" sadistically murdered by soldiers, Naomi imagines one of them trying to save herself by using her sexuality: "[t]his is what a punished dog feels—this abject longing, wretchedness, fear and utter helplessness" (66). The actions of the soldiers are said to be "[a] game to play with animals in the forest" (66). Then, during Old Man Gower's abuse, Naomi says, "[h]e caresses my head as if I were a small animal" (67). This experience, which is said to create "a rift" (69) both in her body and between her and her mother, is then connected, through this imagery, with the actions of the Canadian government. The internment leads to JCs being "herded into the grounds and kept there like animals until they were shipped off" (83). To change this understanding, Naomi needs to find an alternative to the subject positions offered to her by her two aunts.[59] She can no longer be the small animal of her childhood, when "[t]o be whole and safe I must hide in the foliage, odourless as a newborn fawn" (68), even as "already the lie [between her and her mother] grows like a hoary, an unfurled fiddlehead fist, through the soft fontanelle of my four-year-old mind" (68). Even though, or perhaps because, this vision of safety and innocence in nature has been disrupted at least since she was four years old, from before she was fully formed, Naomi does not want simply to invert the binary, to take on the role of the dominator, the domesticator, the owner of animals. She attempts *not* to move from being spoken for to speaking for, from object to subject, as Emily does.

It is significant that while Emily accuses Naomi of being homeless in the present narrative, "unable to stay or go in the world with even a semblance of grace or ease" (54), Emily is also homeless: "Aunt Emily roamed the landscape like an aircraft in a fog—looking for a place to land—a safe and sane strip of justice and reason. Not seeing these, she did not crash into the oblivion of either bitterness or futility but remained airborne" (85). Obasan, on the other hand, can only be "altogether at home" (15) in her house in Granton, because she exists, "in a different dimension of time" (47) where she is deaf and blind to the problems of the modern world: "[s]he does not dance to the multi-cultural piper's tune or respond to the racist's slur. She remains in a silent territory, defined by her serving hands" (248). Obasan, in her old age, is in "that time when the eternal can be most realized" (Grant, *Philosophy* 23), but, since an understanding of the eternal is absent from, or at least unvalued in, the modern world, such a view does not, by itself, provide Naomi with an adequate means of being in the world. Obasan can be at home in her small and ever-shrinking world, surrounded by the past, but for Naomi, such acceptance would be the acceptance of stasis and death, the acceptance that what is uniquely "her own" will have no value beyond her own life, will not lead out to a larger good. Emily responds to Naomi's suggestion that they should, "leave the dead to bury the dead," by saying, "I'm not dead. You're not dead. Who's dead?" (44). However, Naomi is also unwilling to remain airborne, like Emily, questioning the structures of power, struggling for "liberty" (40) in an attempt to bring about the equality promised by modernity at "the end of history" in a manner that repeats the logic inflicted upon JCs. As Graham Huggan argues, "rationalism may easily be misappropriated in order to reinforce the ethnocentric biases of a dominant culture" (132). Thus, both options are unsatisfactory and she must forge a new subject position between Obasan's retention of the past and Emily's belief in the progress of liberal democracy. This alternative is suggested by the possibility of an unworked community, drawing on the symbolism of the excessive productivity of nature that persists despite human attempts to domesticate it.

After trying to rebuild communities during the internment—"[i]n Bayfarm, in Slocan, the community flourishes with [. . .] home-grown enterprise" (175)—the dispersal "East of the Rockies" results in "families already fractured and separated [being] permanently destroyed" (201). Emily argues, "[t]o a people for whom community was the essence of life, destruction of community was the destruction of life" (205). The alienation Naomi feels on arriving in Alberta is apparent. She thinks, "[w]e have come to the moon [. . .] to a place of angry air" (210). When driving to the Barker farm on which they will work in the sugar beet fields, Naomi first notices the weeds: "there are round skull-shaped weeds clinging or occasionally careening off into the brown air" (210). Weeds come to symbolize Granton, especially the harsh, hardy, and persistent thistles: "[t]he thistles, it seems to me, are typical of life in Granton school" (221). Although Naomi is connecting the pricks from the dominant culture that she endures with the environment, she also begins to take on similar rhizomatic behaviours. Initially she feels that there is "no escape" (214) from the hardship of the beet fields; the family works "slash[ing] out the Canada thistle, dandelions, crab grass, and other nameless non-beet plants" (216); in a world filled with insects, and in which, "[w]e are tiny as insects crawling along the grill and there is no protection anywhere" (215), the vastness of the landscape is linked to the vast and incomprehensible machinery of power that seems to control their lives. Soon, though, she begins to escape to the margins that exist despite the apparently endless homogeneity of the sugar beet fields, "hiding" among the thistles "[u]nder the bridge of the irrigation ditch" (220). Weeds, despite persistent weeding, continually resurface. Similarly, the Japanese Canadian community is displaced and dispersed, but not destroyed. Miki argues that

> for many nisei, the disintegration of community did not erase all of its traces, but forced that allegiance, now removed from the geocultural place on the west coast, back into the privacy of family ties, early friendships, local community organizations, all of which resulted in a 'club' mentality. In other words, even though the community bond was broken, community ties continued in diminished form. (111)

This is the survival response of rhizomes, which as Heather Zwicker shows with reference to Homi Bhabha's concept of the hybrid, resist eradication: "Canada [. . .] is a relentlessly verdant national soil that keeps making Canadians out of people, but then trying to weed some out. However, this attempt repeatedly and necessarily fails because the displaced species—the hybrid—confounds classification as flower or weed" (169). Further, this is the response of community to attempts to domesticate, possess, and control it through work: it persists regardless; it unworks the work of systems.

This ability to confound classification prevents the total domination sought by the technological society even though the others to that society, the JCs in this case, are forced to work, weeding beets, in the service of that domination. The eradication of difference sought by the weeding (both of the "non-beet plants" and of the JCs) is endless work doomed to failure. Early in the novel, Naomi dreams about a "huge gentle beast" that "belongs to the man" and whose "obedience is phenomenal" (29). In the dream, it turns out that "[t]he animal is a robot" (29). This conflation of animal and robot in obedient subservience to a man suggests the role played by land and labour in the technological society. That is, land and labour become instruments to be used and controlled through the reason of men to serve their needs. They become domesticated. As Angus states, "[w]hen the wild is subjected to human order the first act is a weeding out" (*Border* 196). This "domestication of the excess that defines the wild shapes the wild order into a humanly convenient one, reduces diversity, and takes the excess for itself" (197). From this, Angus concludes that, "the domestication of the wild does to the wilderness exactly what the exploitation of labour power does to human labour" (197). As such, Naomi's comparison of herself and JCs with weeds is apt. Further, in this process of domestication by which wilderness is rationalized to produce like a machine, and human labour is similarly rationalized, Naomi's experience is that of both a weed and a machine. She is uprooted and tossed to the national margin of Granton, where she is made to further the domination of nature in the name of the national community that has excluded her. Working the sugar beets around Granton, Naomi remembers that they worked, "obedient as machines" (217). The extension of the dominance of technology over non-human nature (animals as machines) to human nature (JCs as machines) becomes explicit. However, this forced obedience is never absolutely successful; JCs never become domesticated, but retain the excessive diversity and productivity of weeds and insects, of land, labour, and language.

The continuation of otherness despite technological control mechanisms creates a basis for a community of resistance in the text. It is one that, importantly, provides a model for social action more generally without succumbing to the threat of a homogenous "humanism" that would require the sacrifice of a Japanese Canadian identity. As Angus argues, there is a need to "set[] up relations between different movements and identities in order to expand the space of democratic action [. . . .] Its plurality is not a problem, but a solution. Its unity is derived from diversity, not opposed to it. Social change is not overcoming and a new foundation, but displacement and acceptance of the Other" (*Border* 185). Despite what Davey says, this unity in diversity is modeled in the novel through Naomi's re-figuration of the natural world. I do not agree with Davey that the novel "implicitly accepts the injustices done to Japanese Canadians during 1940-7 as part of the 'human condition' its universalizing strategies have constructed" (Davey 112) even though such a universalizing move is part of its strategy.

Acceptance of the injustices of racialization and assimilation is not required for the novel to "assert[] the equal standing of Japanese, native Indian, and Caucasian ethnicities as parts of an undifferentiated human community" (Davey 112). An alternative is suggested in the positive associations maintained with Obasan that manage to find hope despite the "it has always been thus" sentiment occasionally expressed.

The question is, I think, how the novel manages to assert equality without making the "human community" "undifferentiated." JCs are repeatedly dehumanized in the novel, both through the recitation of official discourse and through the implementation of government policy during the war. Naomi declares in one of the most polemical passages in the novel,

> [o]h Canada, whether it is admitted or not, we come from you we come from you. From the same soil, the slugs and slime and bogs and twigs and roots. We come from the country that plucks its people out like weeds and flings them into the roadside. We grow in ditches and sloughs, untended and spindly. [. . .] We grow where we are not seen, we flourish where we are not heard [. . .] We come from untold tales that wait for their telling. (247)

Davey argues that, "[t]he passage posits a universal nature, an 'every land,' within which the JCs, 'sprouting,' 'rooted,' can claim membership and thus make a further claim to membership in universal humanity" (108). But this reading disregards the very clear hierarchy of power relations in the passage: JCs are expelled to the margins (ditches and sloughs) and, despite their ability to sprout, remain alienated as they are "sprouting upside-down on the prairies"; their feet are "rooted nowhere" (248). As Lousley points out, "[n]ot only is Davey blind to the multiple natures which Kogawa evokes, he is unable to read her nature imagery as a hybrid form which combines, challenges, and rewrites both Japanese and Anglo-Canadian aesthetics" ("Home?" 341). The passage concludes, "[w]e come from Canada, this land that is like every land, filled with the wise, the fearful, the compassionate, the corrupt" (248). This Canadian origin does not lead, though, to what Davey describes as Japanese Canadian "membership" in a "universal nature" (108), a "we" undifferentiated from that of Mr. Barker and the dominant white society. Some people, in Naomi's description, are doing the plucking and the flinging and some are being plucked and flung.

Discourse, Complicity, Excess

Stephen takes on the relation to nature of those who do the weeding, the dominators. His experience of the internment is different than Naomi's, because, being three years older, while "Nomi thinks she's the same as the neighbours, [. . .] Stephen knows the difference" (90), as Emily records in her diary. Further, during the upheaval just prior to the internment, while Naomi cannot yet read, "Stephen spends his time reading war comics that he gets from the neighbourhood boys. All the Japs have mustard-coloured faces and buck teeth" (109). When they arrive in Slocan, Stephen, in the tall grass, surrounded by butterflies, swings his crutch "like a scythe" (131) until "the ground and grasses are quivering with maimed and dismembered butterflies" (131). However, there remains, "one butterfly he cannot see [. . .] hovering above his head" (132). They are "gold and brown winged things" (131), and, symbolic of the treatment of JCs by their nation-state, Stephen asserts a simple justification for their extermination: "[t]hey're bad" (131). This is a verbatim repetition of what "[t]he girl with the long ringlets" said to

Stephen before the internment and dispersal: "[a]ll the Jap kids at school are going to be sent away and *they're bad* and you're a Jap" (76, emphasis added). Gary Willis argues that "[t]he butterflies, though victims of Stephen's anger, are not its real cause, any more than Japanese Canadians are the real cause of white Canadians' anger after Pearl Harbor. The deepest impulses underlying cruelty are, perhaps, as unarticulated in humans as they are in animals" (n.p). These impulses, though unarticulated, can still appear in discourse. Stephen explains to Naomi that the state of being Japanese Canadian is "a riddle" as "we are both the enemy and not the enemy" (76). Stephen's earlier understanding of the fact of his difference and the discursive contradiction he is forced to inhabit as a result of it, leads to a different response than that found by Naomi. Stephen, after he "undergoes a silencing both literal and figurative" (Cheung 141) in the breaking of his musical instruments and abuse by white boys, "adopts the prejudice and rough ways of his oppressors" (Cheung 142). He adopts the tactics of the dominant culture, but, like it, cannot eliminate otherness entirely: excessive diversity remains.

Although Marie Vautier argues that "[a]s a child, Naomi quickly learns to deny her Japanese heritage in the interests of survival" (198), she does this by adopting the role of the victim, rather than, like Stephen, repeating the actions of those who victimize. The contrast between the two siblings is perhaps most evident when Stephen comes to find Naomi at the swamp near Granton, where she often goes alone, and where "[t]he creatures often reveal themselves in unexpected places" (224). She finds a frog with a broken leg, and as she cups it in her hands, Stephen "grinds some ants to death under his heel" (225). He knows that their father has died; Naomi does not. While Naomi's response to this tragedy is denial—"for years I simply do not believe it" (226)—

Stephen's is to become "increasingly angry" (229). As soon as he is able, he leaves home and distances himself as much as possible from Obasan and Isamu (236). He is "always uncomfortable when anything is 'too Japanese'" (238).

Both reactions, in some ways, make sense as responses to racism. Since JCs are denied viable subject positions through the contradictions of discourse, are denied the homes that stories provide, attempting to eliminate the "Japanese" elements of the self may seem to provide access to the desired subjectivity, to belonging. On the other hand, hiding may offer a means to protect whatever particularity remains until it is safe to reappear. Miki states that "the addition of 'Canadian' to the designated identity, 'Jap' or 'Japanese,' became part of that imagined nation for Canadian-born JCs like Muriel Kitagawa. The same held true for most of the 23,000 who, in the early months of 1942, were classified as persons 'of the Japanese race,' re-named 'enemy alien,' and expelled from their west coast homes" (185). This power to control who has access to the privileged category, "Canadian," the power to name and re-name, divides the "imagined nation" of JCs. Indeed, the community is divided when the government plays off people's fears and desires for self-preservation. Some, like Stephen, adopt the tactics of the government and become victimizers; others, like Naomi, accept the role of victim. Emily notes: "[t]here's a three-way split in the community" and "[s]ome people want to fight. Others say our only chance is to co-operate with the government" (98). The fiction of a united Japanese Canadian community, their "imagined community," unravels with the nation's exclusion of them from the category "Canadian" and they become divided in their attempts to develop a new story that will account for their particularities and/or establish equality throughout society.

In her diary Emily explains how the construction of "otherness" occurs in discourse: "[t]hey're making (they say) accommodation for 1,200-1,300 women and children in that little Park [Hastings]. Bureaucrats find it so simple on paper and it's translated willy-nilly into action—and the pure hell that results is kept 'hush hush' from the public, who are already kicking about the 'luxury' given to Japs" (99). The Nisei are labeled "enemy aliens" (99), and JCs are denied the means by which to counter this representation: "[a]ll cards and letters are censored—even to the Nisei camps. Not a word about the camps makes the papers" (109). JCs are forced to inhabit a discursive contradiction:

> [o]ne letter in the papers says that in order to preserve the 'British way of life', they should send us all away. We're 'a lower order of people'. In one breath we are damned for being 'inassimilable' and the next there's a fear that we'll assimilate. One reporter points to those among us who are living in poverty and says 'No British subject would live in such conditions.' Then if we improve our lot, another says 'There is danger that they will enter our better neighbourhoods.' If we are educated the complaint is that we will cease being the 'ideal servant'. It makes me choke. (94)

The "imagined" Japanese Canadian community is broken and reduced to the material communities of family and neighbours; these are also subsequently broken through the internment and dispersal as able-bodied men are sent out on work crews away from their wives, children, and the elderly who are sent to the ghost towns. However, while the abjection endured by the JCs is enacted through discourse and the recovery of an awareness of coexistence by Naomi at the end of her narrative also occurs in discourse, the two types are different. One claims systematic completion and objectivity while the other recognizes its outside; one works to deny difference while the other maintains space, and shows respect, for difference through silence. Emily works to gain access to the "Canadian" for JCs, but, in so doing, begins to speak for JCs in a manner that ignores material differences among them, that displaces her own vulnerability onto others.

Despite Emily's claim that keeping the family together is the most important thing, and her assertion that the Katos and Nakanes were "intimate to the point of stickiness, like mochi" (20), when she receives permission to move the Kato family to Toronto, she goes. Even though Stephen and Naomi are related to her, and without their mother, the fact is that the Commission is "not giving any special permits but [is] mak[ing] this one exception [for Emily. . . . Since] their name is Nakane" and the Nakane family are "nationals" (116), the exception is not extended to the children. Emily goes to Toronto. Then, upon first being dispersed into Alberta, Naomi says, "[t]hey [Aunt Emily's words] do not touch us where we are planted here in Alberta, our roots clawing the sudden prairie air" (208). Emily's act of speaking for the Japanese Canadian community is, thus, revealed as a repetition of the dominant discursive logic; it homogenizes the experience of the dispersal and misunderstands Naomi's experiences from her, relatively comfortable, position in Toronto. She "exhorts, cajoles, commands" (32), but does not listen or attend to the differences in others' suffering. Like Stephen's simple assertion of butterflies' lack of value, Aunt Emily is able to "write the vision" of the truth and "make it plain" (32) as the text from Habakkuk instructs. For Naomi, however, "the truth" is "more murky, shadowy, and grey" (33). As Goellnicht points out, "Naomi cannot accept as the final word the 'short harsh history' 'in black and white' [. .

.] that Emily presents to her, especially since Emily spent the internment in Toronto, at the center, not in the margins, the deserted camps like Slocan and the depressing prairie towns like Granton" (293). This tension between Emily and Naomi's views places the concluding document in a complex light, as it both repeats and disrupts Aunt Emily's documentary method by which the truth can be made plain.

The novel's postscript is much more complicated than simply an "excerpt from Aunt Emily's papers" that places Naomi's story "in the larger context Aunt Emily always advocated" (Davidson, *Writing* 80), that of setting the historical record straight (Kanefsky 31). Rather, it reveals a "profound ambivalence" (Zwicker 160): "[r]ational, dispassionate and five years too late, the Memorandum is a perfect representation of official history in its assumption that history can be expressed, criticized and put right" (Zwicker 160). Appending this representation to the preceding narrative radically disrupts its signification though.

When Emily first tries to show Naomi the memorandum, Naomi "was ready for bed" and promises to "read it another time" (207). Emily promises to mail it along with Isamu's documents, but Naomi wonders "what use Uncle's documents are to him now that he's dead" (207). While Davey claims that the placement of the document is "outside of Naomi's narration" and "implies the presence of a textual constructor other than her" (111), I am not so sure. It is clear that Emily is in possession of the memorandum during Naomi's narrative and that she promises to send it to Naomi. This would seem to imply that Naomi has appended it to her narrative. While this troubles Davey's contention that Naomi is not the "writer of her own narrative," the ambiguity does enable the novel to "discreetly reinforce[] the *yasashi* values of modesty, self-effacement, and consideration for the feelings of others," and, at the same time, "by writing this narrative itself, it also endorses Emily's call to 'write the truth'" (Davey 111). This duality is productive and irreducible: by not declaring her intentions in adding the document, or even revealing that she has added it, Naomi does not (over-)determine how the document will be read. By appending this document without commentary, it maintains both modesty and recourse to historical particularity. The novel neither condemns nor praises the attempt, however inadequate, of white Canadian men to point out the injustice that had been, and was being, committed: it maintains the historical particularity of the document, but leaves the reader to determine where, exactly, the "truth" of this writing, lies (where it is truth and where it is lies); it does not force the document to yield a singular meaning but allows the multiple meanings to resonate for the reader. As such, it disrupts the ability of the dominant discourse to speak for JCs. It is also an important reconfiguration of Emily's method as it relies on "history" but exposes the particularities on which that history is based.

Apollo O. Amoko discusses *Obasan* as supplement to the homogenizing discourse of official nationalism, by which Kogawa intervenes "in official history by posing a series of 'supplementary questions'" (49). The novel as supplement reveals what is left out of official history, but also reveals history's status as discursive construct, that it has an outside that it cannot account for, an outside that cannot simply be "made up for" by the addition of previously silenced voices. The concluding memorandum serves this supplementary purpose as well. Goellnicht claims that "[t]exts are historically mediated and mediating forms that must situate themselves in history at the same time that they insist on some degree of fictional and linguistic autonomy" (299). It is precisely this status as mediated and mediating that the memorandum reveals for the preceding text of the novel. Naomi's story is situated within a larger historical narrative, is mediated by that narrative but also reveals the power of new stories to influence and change the historical narrative. Even if, as Miki argues, the memorandum reveals that the system has not been overturned by Naomi's narrative, our reading of it will be different when it comes immediately after Naomi's story than it would be if it had come before or in isolation. Ending with the memorandum shows that the system remains intact, reveals and accepts the vulnerability of others to that system, and expresses faith that the readers' intelligences will be "enlightened by love" when faced with the irreducible excess of otherness that the novel opens towards, to which it makes itself vulnerable.

Hence the problems with readings of the novel as a coming to voice (a coming to subjectivity) and readings of it as resolving the contradictions of the self, as it is only by recognizing the limits of the self to know all that Naomi can recover/re-member the co-existence that she imagines having with her mother as a child: "[y]our leg is a tree trunk and I am branch, vine, butterfly. I am joined to your limbs by right of birth, child of your flesh, leaf of your bough" (257). Nonetheless, she remains, at the same time, the child in her dreams with the double wound: "[t]he child is forever unable to speak. The child forever fears to tell. I apply a thick bandage but nothing can soak up the seepage. I beg that the woundedness may be healed and that the limbs may learn to dance. But you stay in a black and white photograph, smiling your yasashi smile" (267). Thus, she does not recover an original unity with her mother. Rather, she engages in a relation between belonging and alienation, a process that recognizes dependence on and separation from others. This is, in other words, coexistence, a non-teleological process that maintains the wounds, scars, gaps, and absences that separate us from each other and through which we can move toward the universal that unites us.[60]

We can, then, reconsider the negative connotations implied when Davey asserts that, "*Obasan* never really chooses between the Issei and Nisei positions it foregrounds in its title and concluding document" (111). Unlike Emily, who "aimed for the heart" (43) of the nation in her attempts to remedy injustice through writing, which brings to mind "conceptions of language as weapon" (Cheung 155), Naomi combines Emily's method with attentiveness. Rather than "always honour[ing] the wishes of others before our own" (Kogawa 137), language, wielded as an instrument of subjective truth, leads to a situation in which, as Rough Lock Bill says, "some people" "[c]an't say more than their names" (Kogawa 159). Such solipsism suggests Grant's summary of Plato's conception of madness: "the tyrant is mad because otherness has ceased to exist for him" (*Justice* 39).

The fact that Naomi "trusts in 'natural' process over personal action, and repeatedly resists Emily's invitations to become a writer and join her 'crusade'" (Davey 111) may be her most remarkable act of resistance, a resistance to the desire for revenge. Since Emily's "crusade" uses the same logic as the oppression inflicted through discourse by the dominant ideology, Naomi's search for an alternative, even if it cannot be represented but only pointed toward, is crucial. In Emily's "desperation to help Naomi speak out, Emily may be guilty of not paying sufficient attention to Naomi's inner speech, to the psychological obstacles that block articulation" (Cheung 162). Thus, Emily is complicit with the tactics of the Grand Inquisitor of Naomi's nightmares. Insofar as Naomi recognizes these tactics and finds an alternative, the novel suggests a way in which the individual can take personal action and bring about progress while still adhering to a concept of limit that positions people within a larger, "natural," order not of their making. Thus, while "[t]he community we choose through political affiliation supersedes that we are given through the accident of birth [and] [w]e must create our own home, through the responsible practice of our citizenship" (Brydon, "Lament" 468), our power to do this is not limitless. The accidents of birth will determine, to some extent, the home we create. Treating community as though it were entirely within our power to control, allies us with the Grand Inquisitor.

Silence v. the Grand Inquisitor

The "Grand Inquisitor," of whom Naomi dreams following the Barkers' visit, "was carnivorous and full of murder. His demand to know was both a judgement and a refusal to hear" (250). This behaviour betrays a lack of attentiveness: if one wants to know, it is necessary to listen, to be silent. Naomi comes to understand that "[w]hat the Grand Inquisitor has never learned is that the avenues of speech are the avenues of silence. To hear my mother, to attend her speech, to attend the sound of stone, he must first become silent. Only when he enters her abandonment will he be released from his own" (250). This release from the feelings of abandonment is what Naomi has been searching for ever since her mother left. Then Naomi was "at the age of questioning" (250). However, like the Grand Inquisitor, since then she has been searching for this release through questioning—"[w]hy, I have asked ever since, did she not write? (250)—and has been unable to advance beyond that stage of development: lacking her mother, and a larger supportive communal framework, she has no satisfactory story to explain her place in the world, nothing that allows her to maintain her particularities as both

"Japanese" and "Canadian." She has only the myth of a pure belonging in Vancouver before the war, before her mother left, before the abuse of Old Man Gower, a myth of a time that never existed and cannot be returned to.[61] She has this myth and the ways in which her two aunts have of explaining the world to themselves. To point toward an alternative, to reveal an outside to these options, Naomi must turn the questioning she has directed against her mother upon her own motives and give up Emily's demand to "know everything" (47). Before learning of her mother's death she manages to shift her questioning from her mother to herself: "[w]hy, I ask now, must I know? Did I doubt her love?" (250). The shift in verb tense—from the present, "ask," to the past, "did"—reveals the transformation: she no longer doubts her mother's love. Further, Naomi comes to an awareness of her complicity, "[a]m I her accuser?" (250), with the torment inflicted by the Grand Inquisitor.

The Grand Inquisitor's demand to know is representative of the modern technological worldview that seeks progress through the rational apprehension of the world. The Grand Inquisitor, "prying open my mother's lips, prying open my eyes" (248), is an embodiment of the technological subject of the modern world, generating techniques to dominate, control, and understand human and non-human nature. As Angus explains, though, this explanation of the world requires that "the world [. . .] be interpreted as if it were an 'objective' order" in which "the knowing subject has been subtracted from participation in the world, and thus the world can be represented in front of a knowing subject who can master it conceptually" (*Border* 187). Or, as Grant puts it, "[r]eason as project [. . .] is the summonsing of something before us and the putting of questions to it, so that it is forced to give its reasons for being the way it is as an object"

(*Justice* 36). This mastery is attempted by the Grand Inquisitor, and the society for which he is a symbol: in attempting to "know" what happened to Naomi's mother, though, "[t]he more he questioned her, the more he was her accuser and murderer. The more he killed her, the deeper her silence became" (250). This demand to know refuses to acknowledge that some things are beyond language, beyond representation, beyond apprehension, beyond reason. Coming to this realization allows Naomi to generate a pause in the proliferation of discourse, to stop demanding answers from her mother.

It is, importantly, through language that the violence of the Grand Inquisitor's demand to know and control is perpetrated in society: "[n]one of us, she [Emily] said, escaped the naming. We were defined and identified by the way we were seen. A newspaper in B.C. headlined, 'They are a stench in the nostrils of the people of Canada.' We were therefore relegated to the cesspools" (126). Later, when reading the letter by which they are dispersed from internment, Naomi states, "in 1972 [. . .] I still do not see the Canadian face of the author of those words" (189). She goes on: "[t]he letters, from the Department of Labour, British Columbia Security Commission, are in purple mimeograph ink—form letters" (190). This lack of a face-to-face, or in any way personal, relation allows the state to remain abstract, claiming to be universal and objective (like God), but, in fact, standing in for the particularity of a certain group (white, male, business), thus its story is a myth. Emily's response to this mythic naming is to simply reverse it: instead of being denied "Canadian" status she insists upon it. Naomi's response is more complex: she allows the productivity of language to proliferate in multiple directions. Naomi's commentary on the form letter sent by "B. Good" to Aunt

Emily provides an example of her method. She exposes the construction of mythic invisibility. She reads his signature as an imperative:

> [b]e good, my undesirable, my illegitimate children, be obedient, be servile, above all don't send me letters of enquiry about your homes, while I stand on guard (over your property) in the true north strong, though you are not free [. . .] Did he experience a tiny twinge of pleasure at the power his signature must represent? Did B. Good sometimes imagine himself to be God?" (39)

B. Good's story, which claims to know what is good for whom, speaks for a subjective particularity that mystifies its subjectivity, claiming its representational rhetoric as truth. Naomi's response interrupts this myth, not by demanding answers (as in the letter Naomi imagines Emily has sent (3[illegible])), but by playing with language, refusing to let B. Good's words yield only one meaning. She reveals the paternalism in his language and recasts the Canadian national anthem from a communal narrative of unity ("we stand on guard for Thee") to one of exclusion ("I stand [. . .] over you[]") disrupting the linkage between strength and freedom. Further, in the questions she ends with, she shows that, although she is in a subordinate position (she will not receive reasons from B. Good), she has not internalized this position, does not accept it as "natural": B. Good does not have the legitimate sovereignty over his "children" that God, presumably, does. As in her encounter with Mr. Barker, Naomi is not "answering the oppressor back" directly. She does not contact B. Good. Rather, she models for the reader a process of disrupting totalizing logic. It is this process that she must learn to bring to her relation with her mother. It is not a replacement of language with silence, but a way of using language to touch upon silence, to touch upon what is excluded by attempts to make language yield singular meaning.

When Naomi hears the story, finally, of what happened to her mother she thinks, "Mother. I am listening. Assist me to hear you" (264). She has stopped trying to make her mother yield her reasons, but has used rational language to reach this point. Maurice Blanchot argues that "in the final analysis one has to talk in order to remain silent" (56). The novel, then, might be understood as Naomi's speaking as a way of coming to (a new kind of "attentive") silence, rather than the process of silence coming to voice that many critics have claimed. Her exposure of the Grand Inquisitor's tactics as an oppressive myth by her accepting the role of listener is the culmination of her refiguration of abjection that has struggled throughout the novel to find a comfortable reciprocity in the first-person plural pronouns "we" and "our."

One key moment in this process occurs when Naomi recounts the trip into the BC interior as a stage in a teleology that can be understood and represented within a cosmic order that has a hopeful purpose:

> [w]e are leaving the B.C. coast—rain, cloud, mist—an air overladen with weeping. Behind us lies the salty sea within which we swim our drowning specks of memory—our small waterlogged eulogies. We are going down to the middle of the earth with pick-axe eyes, tunneling by train to the Interior, carried along by the momentum of the expulsion into the waiting wilderness. [. . .] We are the despised rendered voiceless, stripped of car, radio, camera and every means of communication, a trainload of eyes covered with mud and spittle. We are the man in the Gospel of John, born into the world for the sake of the light. We are sent to

> Siloam, the pool called 'Sent'. We are sent to the sending, that we may bring sight. (119)

Erika Gottlieb suggests, "[i]t is only in this sudden double exposure between the landscape and the people that she [Naomi] finds a ray of hope. In this perspective the human ordeal may assume Biblical significance, as the Japanese Canadians become the eyes for the Canadian community as a whole. Through their suffering they 'bring sight,' making sure that no minority is treated with injustice in the future" (42). If Japanese Canadian suffering is redemptive for the nation, then it acquires meaning in a progressive view of history. Their suffering, like Christ's, is worthwhile because it will prevent future suffering. However, this cosmic order is troubled by the adult Naomi's equation of Christianity and oppressive government rhetoric. As Lim shows, Christianity does not provide the means by which Naomi can reconcile the suffering of the past: "[t]he patriarchal God with his fantastic ability to 'know' all is implicitly contrasted to the suffering Japanese Canadians whose confused fates are dictated by an incomprehensible and patently unfair government. The complicity between the Christian God and the Canadian government is strongly indicated" (n.p.). The reclamation of Japanese Canadian suffering during WWII as a stage in the progress of the nation toward a chiliastic multicultural "unity in diversity" is not sufficient. Naomi's representation of JCs as they are sent into the interior is able, temporarily, to make the experience of internment meaningful as a step in a teleological process leading to universal recognition, but it is also an act of "speaking for." Naomi's "we" stands in, unproblematically, for all JCs— "[w]e are the Issei and the Nisei and the Sansei, the Japanese Canadians. We disappear into the future as undemanding as dew" (120). Claiming to recognize the higher purpose in everyone's suffering during the internment, to understand the reasons, is to speak like Mr. Barker, B. Good, and Aunt Emily. This "we" is not maintained though. As the concluding document shows, the internment does not serve to redeem the nation, and as Naomi's reconciliation with her absent mother shows, it is in attending to the speech of others that we can resist treating others as objects.

The representation that occurs in "[w]e are going down to the middle of the earth [. . .]" (119), then, is importantly different from that in Naomi's recognition of complicity with the Grand Inquisitor. Miki fails to recognize this difference when he reads Naomi's connection between her treatment of her mother and the Anglo-Canadian treatment of JCs in the figure of the Grand Inquisitor as a "misplacement of blame" that "elides the materiality of history" and "valorizes the humanist allegory of suffering as a 'universal' condition" (142). As a result, he argues that in the novel, "Japanese Canadian internment loses its phenomenological edges and takes on the exegetical role of the exemplum. In the descent passage [. . . 'we are going down to the middle of the earth'] a biblical allusion [. . .] frames the expulsion of Japanese Canadians from the west coast as a moral tale" (142). Thus, "[a]s an exemplum, Japanese Canadian suffering brings sight to readers of *Obasan*" (142). This places the JCs in the position of objects, which enable readers of *Obasan* to "see" history "correctly," to see its reasons and fix it: rectify its mistakes, put it in place, and prevent it from reproducing heedlessly in the future. As Miki argues, following Davey, that this ends up "endorsing the 'classical liberal model' of the individual who must make it on her own, or who must 'console herself with visions of transcendence'" (Miki 141). This is an accurate explanation of what is happening in the descent passage. However, Naomi's internalization of an identification with the Grand

Inquisitor is not a means of absolving the dominant society, represented by the Grand Inquisitor, by acknowledging complicity with his methods. Certainly Naomi's response to her mother's silence is materially different from the government's response to the Japanese Canadian minority or Old Man Gower's abuse of Naomi when she was a child. Despite the differences, the recognition of similarity is important insofar as it acknowledges a tendency toward violence in dealing with the unknown of otherness and enables the possibility of suggesting an alternative. It disrupts a binary in which one is either guilty or innocent, victim or victimizer. Rather than making Naomi, as representative of JCs, a modern liberal subject, her identification with the Grand Inquisitor shows the necessary acceptance of the limits of subjectivity and humanism; rather than suggesting that she is as guilty as those who have abused and excluded her, Naomi's recognition of complicity gives her the opportunity to abject her subjective desires for revenge and thereby disrupt the cycle of violence. Naomi accepts responsibility for how she has treated her absent mother; she is no longer speaking for the Japanese Canadian community as she earlier did in attempting to find (biblical) meaning in the internment.

The novel reveals the limits to both modern and mythic consciousness (to appropriate Grant's terms), or what might be called progress and quietism. That is, simple acceptance of the dispersal as a repetition of a biblical exemplum makes the Japanese Canadian experience an instrument for the bringing about of equality in the liberal nation-state. As Gottlieb would have it, Japanese Canadian suffering can alleviate the spiritual blindness of the nation-state and enable it to synthesize this into a higher order of "multicultural unity." As the 1983 Penguin cover implies, the novel has been appropriated as a correction to the history "we" have tried to forget, a narrative of national healing.[62] That is to say that the narrative of healing and "redress" posits the suffering of JCs as, ultimately, valuable for strengthening the nation as a whole. This view was adopted by some in the JC community who felt the internment and dispersal was a "blessing in disguise" (Miki 110) as it promoted assimilation and "progress." However, the effects of such a view are seen in Naomi's desire for "the safety of invisibility" (32) at the beginning of the novel, a necessity to forget one's own particularity to survive in the modern world. Brydon argues:

> *Obasan* is an elegy for lost particularity, and a plea that the value of the particular be recognized and reasserted by the fragments that have survived the sundering. Kogawa continues [George] Grant's questioning of the future that we are building for ourselves through our increasing reliance on the spirit of technology to solve our immediate problems, while ignoring our eternal ones. More specifically, she extends Grant's questioning of the power and desire of Canadian nationalism to promote a vision of the common good through respecting difference. ("Lament" 465)

At the same time, Naomi, and other JCs, are not merely the victims of the Grand Inquisitor's demand to know and to control. Refusal to acknowledge the complicity with his techniques of interrogation and appropriation would suggest that Naomi's narrative can be, as noted above, a simple correction of "history," an addendum that "sets the record straight" by filling in the gaps of the historical narrative, including its "others." That is, it would be simply another version of Emily's method. Kamboureli shows, though, that while "Emily dedicates her life to restoring dignity to her community, [. . .]

she draws her energy and political will from her unproblematized notion of Canada as a democracy. Because Emily never concedes that racialization is embedded in the foundations of the Canadian state, she unwittingly reproduces the liberal ideology that justifies racism within a democratic framework" (188). Thus, Emily is also the Grand Inquisitor. Insofar as Naomi adopts these methods in dealing with her mother's absence, she is the Grand Inquisitor as well: "Naomi recognizes that by demanding answers from her silent mother she may be mimicking the sadistic behaviour of the Grand Inquisitor of her dreams" (Goldman, "A Dangerous Circuit" 379). The justification of such logic proceeds from the idea that human knowledge should be limitless and that history is made by human subjects in a teleological narrative of progress culminating in freedom, as opposed to the notion that history is outside of human control and the best one can hope for is to avoid suffering (as expressed by Obasan and Isamu). While the silence of Obasan and Isamu, which such a worldview leads to (a passive quietism), is also oppressive for Naomi, she needs to recognize her complicity with the logic of the Grand Inquisitor if she is to learn both to speak otherwise and attend to the speech of others by abjecting her subjective desires for mastery.

As Gayle Fujita argues, "Naomi perceives that she has acted like the Grand Inquisitor, obsessed with her own abandonment and forgetting to attend to the possibility of her mother's greater suffering. Recognition of her culpability as Mother's accuser is her supreme act, for only in the space created by self-denial, by a deliberate attendance, can Mother be restored" (39). This restoration, if only temporary and provisional, is the result of Naomi's articulation of a new story, one that exposes the inadequacy of the victim/victimizer binary. As Kogawa has said, "I think victimizers experience a onedimensional identity of their own sense of victimization and therefore the corrective to this situation is for us all always to know we are both" ("Interview" 463). When Naomi, temporarily able to inhabit this double-consciousness, attends to her mother's suffering and finds comfort for her own, she also reveals that the Grand Inquisitor's methods will never force their way into an understanding of the "truth" because they are without love.

This method of self-abjection, a recognition of guilt that disrupts the binary system, allows Naomi to get outside of the position of homeless victim assigned for her by the dominant society and which she previously attempted to inhabit. This reaches its culmination in the restoration of the absent mother, but is prefigured from the opening of the novel with the consistent development of positive identifications with silence, nature, Natives, etc.: beings and states of being that are typically objectified, ignored, and made abject and homeless by dominant discourse. Unfortunately, the idea that such a repudiation of binary hierarchy can be complete or successful, and that in the novel Naomi succeeds in "getting back to the primal source or origin of her being" (Cook 48), cannot be simplistically maintained. The claim, that "[b]y the end of her narrative, Naomi has completed this journey [to the "undifferentiated beginning of things"]" (Cook 49) clearly comes apart simply by noting that Cook ignores the memorandum with which the novel actually concludes. This document, signed by three men with Anglophone names—"James M. Findlay," "Andrew Brewin," and "Hugh Macmillan" (274)—reveals a continued degree of exclusion for JCs from the imagined community of the nation. This memo returns the novel to historical particularities from the harmonious abstraction of chapter thirty-nine which ends with Naomi, wearing Aunt Emily's coat,[63] returning to

Isamu's favourite spot in the coulee and witnessing the moon's reflection in the river as "water and stone dancing. It's a quiet ballet, soundless as breath" (271).

This image of harmonious interaction among natural elements that refigures the questioning and silence of the proem—"[i]f I could follow the stream down and down to the hidden voice, would I come at last to the freeing word? I ask the night sky but the silence is steadfast. There is no reply" (n.p.)—is displaced and re-determined by the memorandum. As Miki argues, "[t]he implication, in the materiality of the document, is that nothing has happened to change the social and political background to Naomi's experiences" (116). White men still get the last word, still get to speak for JCs. Further, in ending with this document, "*Obasan* [. . .] instead of resolving the dichotomy between silence and speech, between representation and exposure, ends within a gap where private and public are dichotomized as a stasis. Japanese Canadians are still *spoken for*" (Miki 117). He goes on to say,

> [w]hile such a document [. . .] demonstrates that not all Canadians were brutally indifferent to the violation of citizenship rights, it also closes the novel with Japanese Canadians framed as the 'other' with no voice and language, and who therefore have to be spoken for by white males. The rhetoric of their letter, its use of liberal terminology, mimics—albeit for other purposes—the same rhetoric adopted to justify the dispossession of Japanese Canadians. The writers, in fact, point to the destruction of the community and assimilation as evidence that they *no longer* pose a security threat to Canada. There is no outrage at the victimization made possible by racist legislation and policies. The system, in other words, remains intact. (139)

Even if Naomi manages a moment of connection with her relatives, living and dead, and the larger Japanese Canadian community, she has not recovered, in the sense of possessing, the lost origins. She has, rather, uncovered their absence. This absence carries over into the memorandum, though, and infects/contaminates it with a gap, disrupting the unity of stasis, that Miki describes, with movement. Something *has* happened.

Naomi notes, "[t]here are so many betrayals—departures, deaths, absences—there are all the many absences within which we who live are left" (268). It is absence, not presence, that is left to the survivors. Naomi's "attentive silence" vis à vis her mother reveals the limits of language as an act of "speaking for." She has chosen the abjection of the listener, which disrupts the system of representation: "for listening is not just the absence of speech but a willed act in its own right" (Zwicker 156). Nevertheless, the memorandum shows that her awareness and exposure of this fact is, itself, insufficient to overturn the system. Still, a gap has been created in the system's apparent totality by Naomi's narrative, and this gap extends out, beyond the novel. Indeed, after reading Naomi's re-readings of historical documents, all of Emily's various documents, we have been given the tools to read this one differently, to reveal it as the act of "speaking for" that Miki describes, rather than Naomi's recourse to "universal justice and law" (111) as Davey claims. It is precisely the apparent "universality" that we are called on to question.

Ultimately, Naomi's silence surrounding the memorandum with which the novel ends is an abjection. However, while her narrative is retrospectively determined by this postscript—the history of Japanese Canadian internment and dispossession will not be "fixed" by well-meaning liberal sentiments—the postscript is also prospectively determined by the narrative we have just completed. Naomi gives up the right to have the last word in her own narrative, choosing rather to hand it over to a minority within the elite whose dominance resulted in her suffering. Despite their intentions, this minority remains complicit with the elite and views JCs as other to the nation. Nevertheless, Naomi's recognition of her own complicity prevents us from absolutely condemning this attempt to "do the right thing" even as it overwrites JC particularity. Naomi speaks on behalf of Japanese Canadians in the novel. She speaks on behalf of Native Canadians. She speaks on behalf of women and nature and the elderly. To refuse to allow herself to be spoken for in turn would be to either claim a position of mastery or abandon a politics of representation and condemn herself to the silence that cannot speak its own particularity, to choose Emily or Obasan's story. Rather, she chooses to forge equivalences, to create a community of resistance that accepts that others will speak on her behalf sometimes, even if, in attempting to build an inclusive home, they get some things wrong and need to start over in the movement between particular and universal, in a new questioning of the paradigm in which they have been living. In giving up the last word, the novel puts faith in its readers to read the memorandum out of their particularity with a respect for otherness and to accept the challenge it offers to begin to try and tell "our" story again.

Chapter Four: Write at the Limit: *Places Far From Ellesmere* and Mythic Female Space

> There are these two sides to language: *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* is the great-given, the sum total of words and grammar and literature and concluded speech. *Parole* is what one of us says, the uniqueness of the speaking (writing) person. If you are unlucky, the great-given swamps you, and even when you speak, you are silent. If you are incredibly lucky, and if you work your ass off, the great-given sounds, not over, but *in* your unique speaking. If that happens, then you have found a Voice.
>
> —*Robert Kroetsch*, "The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues" (1989)

> We willingly read a map as unitary and sensible, coherent and factual story. Anyone who has needed maps to save his or her life knows how willingly we trust them; often, we cannot afford to think that they impart anything other than what our eyes confirm. Yet maps result partly from their makers' imaginations; looked at objectively, many maps exhibit so much abstraction that, if they were not anonymous and were not stamped with the authoritative name of an institution, we might wish to suspend the disbelief that they need in order for their two dimensions to represent reality, rather than their makers' creativity. Maps usually entice us by their oath of verisimilitude, but what if the map that claims to depict where you live does not seem to offer you a place to locate yourself?
>
> —*I.S. MacLaren*, "A Charting of the van Herk Papers" (1987)

MacLaren's map metaphor describes *parole* representing itself as *langue*, the unique acts of particular imaginations represented as universal objective reality. One who is left off the map, to avoid being swamped and silenced by the inherited map, can try to redraw the map, creating a new space on it, or one can reject the map-making project and work to remain "out of place," uncharted. In Aritha van Herk's two novels immediately preceding *Places Far From Ellesmere* she attempts to find a comfortable female space of belonging, first in one position and then in the other. In *The Tent Peg* (1981) she engages in "re-drawing the map" (MacLaren xxi), but this novel concludes with J.L.'s "willing participation, once commanded, to join in the staking of the Midas claims" (MacLaren xxxi)[64] and thereby perpetuates the masculine domination of nature, through geologic exploration and mining, which maps both enable and represent. In *No Fixed Address* (1986), van Herk's next novel, she is engaged in "refusing the map" (MacLaren xxxii).

The novel ends with Arachne, the heroine, disappearing "off the map" into the apparently "blank space" of the North. This conclusion is ultimately unsatisfying as well because it rejects any connection to community and depends, for its escape from repressive structures (underwear, maps, narratives) upon a representation of self-sufficient transcendent agency for the main character.[65] Thus, in these two novels we have either complicit participation in the system that previously denied female subjectivity displaced onto the domination of another "other" (i.e. nature) or a silent refusal to speak, solipsistic self-isolation through disappearance that is ultimately quietist as it permits the system to remain unchallenged. The interplay between these positions, how to interrupt myth without instituting a new myth, to find a position between belonging and homelessness is what we find Aritha van Herk struggling with in her subsequent novel, *Places Far From Ellesmere*.

To find this new position she attempts to invent a new form of writing that has been described "both as a genreless work, and as a new genre, a 'geografictione'" (Joan Thomas 68). As the neologism suggests, this brings together elements of geography and fiction, but it also draws on myriad other discourses (autobiography, history, journalism, marketing, cartography, etc.) in ways that seek to expose the biases of these discourses, the ways in which they mystify their contradictions and represent themselves as unified; they mystify their work in the service of the myth of patriarchal belonging and progress. Shirley Neuman focuses on van Herk's resistance to autobiography as a male genre, arguing that a female autobiographer who "wants to define herself outside her culture's gender prescriptions rather than mark herself in the masculine," necessarily,

> steps well outside the history of women's use of the genre and the poetics of women's autobiography that have been elaborated over the past fifteen years to describe that history. [. . .] Briefly: autobiography is a public discourse of a subject's destiny, but the ideology of gender elaborated in our public discourses has relegated women—until very recently, at least—to the private sphere and to no destiny save marriage. Ergo, women have been able to write in the public discourse of autobiography only by aping the fictions of selfhood and identity that the discourse constitutes as 'universal,' which is to say, only by aping male subjectivity. [. . .] Women's autobiography is, in the gendered discursive conditions in which the conventions of autobiography developed, an oxymoron, an impossibility. Which is not to say, of course, that women have not found strategies for attempting the impossible. (n.p.)

These "strategies for attempting the impossible" are what I am interested in, not just in relation to the conventions of autobiography as a genre, but in relation to systems generally, to language as a system and its own "impossible" ability to reveal its excess. In *Places Far From Ellesmere* van Herk searches out new strategies for attempting this impossibility of writing a female life in a female space, as a way of being comfortably in a space that does not repeat the domination on which masculine claims of belonging were built.

The Limits of Stories

Dedicated to "Ellesmere, that it will stay, eternally, mysteriously, its own geografictione" (n.p.), *Places* highlights the interconnection between geography and fiction in making a home, a space of belonging, a place to locate oneself, a story to inhabit. Ellesmere is called upon to stay eternally and mysteriously that which it is, namely, according to the subtitle, a "geografictione." That is, it is both geography, which is, presumably, more or less stable (at least in relation to the span of human memory), and fiction, which is, necessarily, in a continual state of flux (as opposed to the (apparent) stability of myth). At the same time, one of the ways we have access to geography is through the representations of fiction: Ellesmere's status as geography is created through fiction(s), and the fiction that creates it is generated in response to its geography.[66] The island then, an *object* within the colonial-national-capitalist-patriarchal system of mapping/naming/possessing, is addressed in the novel as a *subject* with the agency both to remain as it is, and, to do so, change. The author desires for it, paradoxically, to remain both geography and fiction.

However, not only does the title emphasize Ellesmere (as the only named place in the title), but also the "places far from" it. It suggests that these are the places with which it is primarily concerned and the importance of Ellesmere is, really, in what it can do for the rest of the world, what it can represent for all the places far from it. As such, the text threatens to make of Ellesmere an ideal, exotic, northern other to the troubled southern places and thereby repeat the use of the feminine in masculine narrative and the feminization of the landscape in those narratives.[67] Despite the relative length of each of the text's sections (of which "Ellesmere, Woman as Island" is by far the longest, comprising fully half of the book), the title stresses both Ellesmere and the not-Ellesmere places it describes—Edberg, Edmonton, and Calgary—and, by extension, all places distant from that northern desert island. This is significant because, despite the move toward Ellesmere as an ideal place of undetermined freedom that transcends the homelessness/belonging binary, from the beginning the reader is cautioned of the impossibility for the fiction of Ellesmere to attain the status of myth because of the continual reference to and intrusion of the "places far from" it. The re-presentation of this excess interrupts the various myths that appear in the book and locates its story at a limit: *Places* shows the dependence of various myths on their outsides. The speaker,[68] searching for a home, remains only a visitor on Ellesmere, and while desiring that island as a potential space for female belonging, ultimately abandons this desire for possession when she recognizes that Ellesmere is a particular *place*, not merely an abstract *space*, and that satisfying her desire would involve a discursive domination of that otherness. In the end, as we will see, the speaker performs the text's epigraph, abjecting her desire for a self-contained space of belonging, so that Ellesmere can remain "its own."

In addition to the preliminaries of subtitles and dedication, a series of epigraphs precedes the text proper, placing the text that will follow in relation to particular theoretical stories. Quotations from Claude Lévi Strauss, Michel Foucault, and Albert Camus, along with a parenthetical narrator's comment upon the quotations, establish some of the concerns of the geografictione to follow. The Strauss quotation questions the concept of "travel" as solipsistic activity; Foucault defines a "discursive formation" by what it is—"a space of multiple dissensions"—and is not—"an ideal, continuous, smooth text" (qtd. in van Herk n.p.); and Camus laments the loss of places of solitude (islands and deserts) and asserts their necessity. In apparent response to these male, canonical, European theorists, we read, "[In the exploration of memory and place lie unsolved murders; in the multiple dissensions of distance and time, certain conditions prevail. The world admits deserts and islands but no women]" (n.p. parentheses in original). This final, parenthetical (and therefore under erasure) epigraph gives the reader an indication of the text's concerns: the exclusion of women from discursive formations (i.e. their homelessness), the privileged places of apparent isolation (deserts and islands) that claim to be self-enclosed, and the unsolved murders resulting from the repressed exclusions on which stories are built.

This geografictione is drawing a new map to include a previously excluded element, telling a new story that points beyond the limits of previous ones. At the same time, though, this exposure of female exclusion from the supposedly universal concerns of European theory and fiction is not a simple rejection of that theory and tradition. Indeed, the theoretical concerns outlined by these epigraphs are the concerns of the geografictione that follows and the speaker's familiarity with them is part of her particularity and enables her to think beyond them. She utilizes "her own" as a means of accessing "the good," even though elements of that particularity have excluded other elements of her own (the Western tradition offers a way of explaining the world that she has access to, but it limits or denies other aspects of what she knows due to her embodiment). *Places*, then, locates itself at the limit between stories. It is coming out of the story of a particular tradition, and it depends on that story, but it is looking at what is outside of it.

The text that follows these epigraphs seeks to explore the "multiple dissensions" of the discursive formation of memory and place and the unsolved murders that lie within (especially that of Tolstoy's eponymous heroine/victim Anna Karenin, which becomes a metonym for the denial of female freedom in canonical literature), by exposing the mythic exclusion of women from the world and the discourses that make it. This exploration and exposition is performed through questioning the coherence of home, belonging, and possession, and their opposites: homelessness, escape, dispossession.

It is within stories that these issues are mediated. The tradition that creates the reality it purports to describe can be disrupted in story as well as perpetuated, but the disruption can also become a new mythology, the creation of a new "reality" in its description, positing itself as the smooth text that resolves the contradictions of a discursive formation. In *Places* van Herk's narrator becomes Levi Strauss's traveler exploring "deserts of memory" who, as Camus advocates, to "understand the world," turns away from it to the solitude of a desert island. In short, she puts herself in the position of the masculine tradition of objective observation, in which, as Ian Angus explains, the world is represented as "standing apart from a subject who represents that world cognitively to itself" (*Border* 187). The text is thus at risk of (re-)creating myth, by which representation claims to be "an ideal, continuous, smooth text that runs beneath the multiplicity of contradictions" (Foucault qtd. in van Herk n.p.). That is, as some critics have suggested, through travel and an exploration of solitude, the text is in danger of imposing an exclusive female myth that suggests the same, but opposite, totality as that of the male myth van Herk is writing against. This even becomes a danger in the narration, as the continuous use of second-person narration suggests, through the pronoun "you," that there is a split narrator, part of which stands outside the world and describes what the other part, embodied and worldly, does. However, though this objective ideal may be the speaker's desire ("you" want to see "yourself" and the world clearly), that towards which she continually attempts to move, the contradictions, dissensions, and oppositions of the embodied speaker intrude on the ideal and are described rather than resolved (re-presented rather than simply represented). As the "you" of the text includes the reader and, as such, is universalizing, it also suggests the potential that "you" are being instructed, ordered, "spoken-for." The range of its significations is ultimately undecidable.

W.M. Verhoeven has critiqued van Herk's text for this undecidability. She writes, "van Herk wavers between wanting to escape beyond language and trying to colonize the male terrain by appropriating male discourse and destabilizing its representations of women" (77). This appropriation of male discourse is enabled by the speaker's university education following her escape from Edberg to Edmonton, but Verhoeven's criticism does not consider the possibility that "wavering" is a positive way to prevent reification and move toward "the good" of a new story, a new home, without imposing myths of dominance. van Herk locates her narrator between the particular and the universal, escape and colonization. In Edmonton the particular is, partly, the traditional/historical male discourse (myth) in which van Herk/her narrator becomes steeped at university:

> You read *Eugene Onegin* too and *The Diary of a Madman*, *The Nose*, *The Overcoat*, *A Hero of Our Time*, *Poor People*, *Notes from Underground*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Fathers and Sons*, *Childhood*, *The Cossacks*, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. A male course, now that you look at it, a very male course, and you must have gone too far, gotten carried away, *Anna Karenin* not on the list for Russian 320, you invented the necessity to read her yourself. (81)

The universal, that which is beyond language and its inherent power relations, remains unattainable, even though university education offers an opening onto other worlds. Here the other world is Russian literature, but it remains male dominated, male/lineated (the "universal" onto which it opens is exposed, in retrospect, as a particularity to which she has limited access). It is only years later that the reading list is recognized as not the (universal) essence of Russian Literature that it purported to be, although a lack was felt at the time, leading to the reading of *Anna Karenin*. The fact that *Anna Karenin* is still a male text suggests the limits available to the narrator at the time in unworking myth. Indeed, her escape into books more generally while in Edmonton, seeking "words, the neat enlistment of notes, the swollen pages of portentous papers" (47), provides an escape from the inadequacy of the city and its story: "[if] lovers cannot be found in Edmonton, they can be found in books" (46). Thus, she spends "[s]ix years engaged in long division, and without ever having put down your book" (53). She seeks the alternate reality of stories.

At the same time, though, as she avoids, through stories, her inability to belong, while she has been reading she is "degreed, married, authored, even public and published" before she gets "out of there" (53). This view of literature as an alternative to "the world at large and Edmonton its stagnation point" (48), and reading as a potential means "to get from this place farther, [. . .] to reach the reaches of the world, and maybe Russia" (48), becomes the means of complicit resistance Verhoeven describes: it depends on the language of male discourse even as it disrupts it. There is an "urgency of reading [that] seems to derive from the need to challenge the discursive forces that write one's self into place. Although acknowledging that it is in an important sense placed and enabled by these forces, reading also relies on an element of exteriority or alterity that allows it to disobey any scriptural logic" (Heim 140). Reading becomes, then, exploratory, in Otto

Heim's sense, a process of reading the inherited map of experience "to test its limitations and to ascertain the existence of unmapped spaces and locations both within the confines of the territory covered by the map and beyond" (Heim 138).

Verhoeven's criticism, then, is justified, to the extent that van Herk's text wavers between a pure deconstruction of male discourse, on one hand, and a desire for women to be included in its system of power on the other (to work within its limits), to build a home and simultaneously question the myth-making process by which a home is built. However, wavering between these positions may be, in fact, the most ethical, and hopeful, and resistant place to be, a place at the limit of story. Angus searches for a figure to describe this interplay when he argues that the recovery of place "must also be a peek beyond—but perhaps not 'beyond' any more. We need to seek new metaphors here—a 'gearing into,' perhaps, or a 'swaying with' the places through which we are defined" ("Locality" 22). Even though these metaphors may be rather awkward, they can serve to shift the negative connotations of Verhoeven's "wavering" into a more positive realm. Rather than "depending on the complete reversal of a symbolic order, [the possibility of change] resides in the ongoing resignification that the imagination [. . .] performs where experience and discourse touch" (Heim 143). The speaker wants to escape beyond language through language,[69] but needs to appropriate male discourse and destabilize its representations of women to do it, even if that appropriation makes her complicit and means her escape will remain incomplete, limited.

In Edmonton the speaker foresees this problem of seduction by male discourse (a desire to take over the reigns of power and control them herself), which will become fully apparent on Ellesmere. With the metaphor of "long division" she addresses the internal conflict between a desire to be fixed, stable, located, and the urge to escape, avoid the murderers of language (those who make it yield objects, corpses). In the end, she chooses flight over Edmonton—"[s]wearing you will never return to the sites of seduction and rage, to the baffling problem of an eternal long division of the self" (53)—she leaves for Calgary.

The problem, though, cannot be escaped entirely. It is only through the particularity of "home" (in the material restrictive sense) that van Herk's speaker is able to "un/read Anna" (i.e. the patriarchal constraints within which Tolstoy writes her) on Ellesmere. It is only through her beginnings in Edberg, Edmonton, and Calgary (and her subsequent recognition of their limits, her (re-)readings of these places) that she can move out towards the (supposed) absence of Ellesmere and the silence beyond language, which surrounds all particularities. Since it is only within language that this move can be performed it is inevitable that it will "waver" between escape from dominant discourse and appropriation of it: the possibility of resistance is always already complicit with what it seeks to resist (Slemon, "Unsettling" 37). Thus the university experience van Herk describes serves to "place" her speaker more firmly in the story she desires to escape even as it provides her with the skills to un/read that story as myth.

The particularity of van Herk's (narrator's) own, her region, her "home," enables her to make sense of the world and question it, to mediate the other's particularity even though something of it will elude her, remain "beyond language," and thus tempt her to domination and control. At the same time, this ability to understand and question arises out of the system of domination and control that she seeks to transgress. Jenny Sharpe argues that "the colonial subject who can answer the colonizers back is the product of the same vast ideological machinery that silences the subaltern" (143). The same might be said for the female subject who can answer the patriarch, which is the process that van Herk is engaged in, writing back against Tolstoy who stands in for patriarchy, oppression, productivity, etc. Indeed, her university education is part of the ideological machinery that silences the subaltern and enables van Herk, through her speaker, to speak,[70] but, speaking as "you," the speaker also speaks toward silence, speaks at a limit that touches upon silence.

Narrating the Limit

van Herk's point of view in the "novel," her use of the second-person, creates a multivalent referent. While Brian Richardson argues that "[s]econd person narrative may be defined as any narration that designates its protagonist by a second person pronoun" (311), it also includes "ambiguity over the identity and status of the 'you': it is, at the outset, epistemologically a more dubious pronoun than the traditional 'I' or 'she,' which we ordinarily have no trouble processing as we encounter a fiction for the first time" (312). van Herk has said,

> I really wanted to avoid the first person pronoun in *Ellesmere*, because there's a notion that it's a version of bio-text or life writing. Using the first person would have misled the reader into thinking that *Ellesmere* was a kind of transparency of a life, when in effect it's about how you write places, how you write the biography or autobiography of places, as opposed to the autobiography of a person. ("Grace" 24)

If, though, it is a kind of "biography or autobiography of places," then it is "a version of bio-text or life writing" and the fact that the places dealt with in the novel are the places van Herk has lived makes it impossible not to, partly, equate the "you" of the text with the "I" of van Herk. However, because it is "you" and not "I," the one pronoun does not fit into the other without remainder: they are not equivalent.

Critics of *Places Far From Ellesmere* almost always mention the second-person narration, and claim that van Herk's use of it supports their reading of the text, but these critical discussions of the narration are not consistent in placing its significance. Marlene Goldman states that "[t]he narrator's use of the inclusive pronoun 'you' [. . .] emphasizes that all women have suffered from the rigid frame imposed by the representation of woman as Woman" ("Earth-Quaking" 36). However, this reading merely reverses the gender-essentialist imposition of representation by excluding men from inclusion in the pronoun, thus creating a new, but equally exclusive, myth. The pronoun "you," rather, evades the dangers of both the solipsistic "I" and the essentialist third person, suggesting "s/he" is an "every(wo)man." "You" provides a more indeterminate referent. It is between standard modes of (male) discourse: it is addressed (directly) to the other. The pronoun "you" *cannot not* include, to some degree, all readers of the text, no matter their sex. As Richardson states, the "you" "necessarily addresses the reader as well as the central character" (312): in addressing the character it is always already an act of "speaking for" and enacts a silencing of the speaker even as she speaks: "you" are continually being told what "you" are doing, thinking, feeling, etc.

Monika Fludernik states that the second-person "always relies on the submerged deictic significance of the original address function of this pronoun" (n.p). As deictic—

"of or denoting a word or expression whose meaning is dependent on the context in which it is used" (Deictic)—the pronoun always calls attention to the particularities surrounding its use. The narration, in this way, is metonymic for the novel: meaning is created by language in context, in place (i.e. surrounded by the particular history and geography in which it appears). Richardson concludes his discussion of "standard second person fiction" by summarizing: while it could "be narrated in either the first or third person, the choice of the 'you' form radically changes the tone of the work and provides a unique speaking situation for the narrator, one that does not occur in natural narratives and consequently one that continuously defamiliarizes the narrative act" (319). Thus, van Herk's conscious avoidance of saying "I" does not prevent the text from being a kind of life-writing, but it does prevent that life from seeming to appear "transparently" in writing. It calls attention to the conventions of "realism" and (auto-)biography that can easily go unnoticed, conventions that are necessary for the transmission of meaning[71] but also determine that meaning to some extent. They provide the context that surrounds particular texts and make them yield.

Thus we can see the reductive nature of Aron Senkpiel's claim that the "you" in *Places* is, simply, van Herk herself: "notwithstanding van Herk's use of the second person, we equate the voice of [the] work with its author" (124). Asta Mott, on the other hand, argues that the text "implies the conflation of the narrator and the reader. The use of the second-person narrative modifies the conventions of autobiography and destabilizes the relationship of narrator and reader" (104). Mott thereby acknowledges the autobiographical elements of the text, but neither conflates van Herk with, nor separates her from, the narrator while also recognizing that the address of the second-person cannot avoid including the reader. This ambiguity may be one reason why, according to Richardson, "there are as yet no second person autobiographies" (324). Considering that his article was published in 1991, the year after the publication of *Places*, we might consider this geografictione to be the first second-person autobiography and a prescient answer to his prediction that "some self-consciously postmodernist or oppositional [autobiographies] will no doubt appear" (324) using the second-person. However, as Richardson himself points out, the pronoun is inherently unstable, and, as such, cannot be used to write "auto" biography as normally understood.

The second-person pronoun is meant to be identified with van Herk herself but also to move beyond the singular/personal, as Mott suggests. Or, rather, we cannot decide, for the text as a whole, if it is second-person singular or plural. Matthew Manera claims that *Places* is "[a] second person singular narrative" (89): the proliferation of apparent referents in critical commentaries points to the indeterminacy and plurality of the narrative "you." The pronoun encompasses the reader, perhaps most immediately the female reader, as Goldman argues, but also the male reader in a more broadly universalizing move. It also encompasses Ellesmere Island and Anna Karenin. That is to say that the text is grounded in the particularities of its author, as a Dutch/Canadian, female, Albertan, academic, etc. who grew up near Edberg, was educated in Edmonton at the University of Alberta, now lives and works in Calgary, and took a trip to Ellesmere Island. But it also exposes the reader, through this personal exposure, to the limits of myth, the conventional limits of narrative. The myth that "you" inhabit does not account for your particularities, does not allow for them, and this exposure of limits makes readers aware of myth's inability to encompass their particularities even when it speaks for "you." It reveals that conventional limits are not "natural" and that they, in fact, require particularities to be sacrificed to their systematization. At the same time as the text denies the possibility of myth to satisfactorily account for particularities, it ultimately rejects parochial isolation, striving to represent community at the limit between individuals. This movement, between individual and community, particularity and universality, isolation and belonging, one's own and the good, occurs through the fusion of geography and fiction with life-writing. It is in the concept of "home" that these issues cohere, and it is through questioning this concept that this movement begins in *Places Far From Ellesmere*.

Limited Homes

Rather than Northrop Frye's "Where is here?" (222), which presupposes that "here" is "home" and that the work of literature is to identify/define an already preexisting unity, van Herk's geografictione asks "Where is Home?" This is a question that is immediately displaced, though, through the narration, as the second-person "you" who seeks a home in the text can never find the absolute home of myth for "us" because the "you" always refers to an other, an outside. The desire for a home is both maintained and resisted. van Herk has, in interview, articulated this as a sense of "homesickness" which inf(l)ects Canadian literature. On one hand, "immigrants [. . .] are looking for a home" and, on the other, "if you're really at home you become very complacent" ("Grace" 19). As "geografictione," *Places* performs this questioning of home, in part, through a focus on geography. A critical attention to geography serves to disrupt modernity's narrative of progress by exposing the system's excess (land is prior to the system, generates the system's productivity, and is irreducible to an element within the system like any other). At the same time, though, geography, and the novel's use of it, is threatened by complicity with the system through a repetition of a systematic method: a possibility of recovering a pre-existent unity through a focus on geography, which would (re-)create the land, of Ellesmere, as the basis for a system of equality based on fundamental borders and exclusion, a new, northern, feminist regionalism is held out. The questioning of home is undertaken by interrupting the myths that surround the places that van Herk has, personally, called "home" or sought to make into homes. These myths, of freedom, progress, etc. are interrupted, as we will see, through a revelation of their outsides, their histories (and geographies). It is through literature that this exposure of myth's limits in geography is performed and represented. In the performance there is sharing of community that moves toward a universal home, while in the representation there is a temptation toward the fixity of parochial limits.

J. Macgregor Wise explores this complexity in the multivalent significations of the word "home":

> it is crucial that we separate the ideas of *home* and *the home*, home and house, home and *domus*. The latter terms in these pairs of contrasts are proper, normative, and may have little to do with comfort. Indeed, the home may be a space of violence and pain; home then becomes the process of coping, comforting, stabilizing oneself, in other words: resistance. (300)

This type of resistance is the process that van Herk is engaged in with her geografictione. In performing a movement toward a new home the speaker resists the imposed limits created in the representation of the homes she is seeking to escape. It is too easy, though, to suggest that a clear line can be drawn between *home* and *the home*. They cannot be separated: to paraphrase Grant, whatever access to "home" we have is available only through first meeting it in "the home." That is to say that the ideal of "home" can only be moved toward through the particularities of "the home." Even though I would agree that a distinction exists, whatever our concept of an ideal "home" is, it depends on the material existence of 'the home' into which we were born and all of the homes in which we live subsequently. To explore this connection in relation to van Herk's text, I will consider "the homes" described in *Places Far From Ellesmere* and their failure to be '"home." The text's concern with the limits of home begins, and in some ways ends, for the narrator of *Places*, in Aritha van Herk's "hometown" of Edberg, Alberta.

The first word in the first section of *Places Far From Ellesmere*—"Edberg, coppice of desire and return" (13)—is "home" (13) and the initial concern is with ways to escape this "home." A colon follows "home" defining it as "what you visit and abandon: too much forgotten/too much remembered. An asylum of your origins, your launchings and departures, the derivations of your dream geographies" (13). Home is a site of contradiction, a place of beginnings to which the narrator remains connected no matter how many times she leaves. It is a "coppice of desire and return" (13), that site from which desire begins and to which it "comes home" again, or tries to: "[i]t still seems endless: Edberg. Without a time limit or the decency to know when to efface itself. Worse, it claims you, insists on a reference, influence, empreinte" (15). Edberg, the embarrassing small town, will not be completely controlled. It will continue to exert some control; it comprises a set of narratives that she is born into, that exceed her subjectivity, and that she has since borne with her wherever, and no matter how far, she goes: "Edberg has carved itself into the cleft of your mouth. Your nose has an Edberg slope to it, your eyes Edberg's hills" (36). Origins cannot be contained within, controlled by, a self-sufficient, complete, systematic subject. Indeed, the speaker's agency is continually overwritten by Edberg's social structures, leading to her desire to escape.

In the section "Allowances" we are told that they are "[w]hat you weren't" (24). The list of prohibitions stretches on to six pages, leaving only self-destructive rebellion as a means of escape. We read, "[d]rink and get laid and get away and quit school. Quit school and get away and get laid and get drunk. Reverse all orders: this is as far as you can get from home. This is place, inescapable. This is as far as you can get. The train leaves and doesn't return" (23). This desire to reverse orders continues through the subsequent sections despite the text's deconstructive ambitions. That is to say that it is tempted to impose a new (opposite) representation in place of the old one, a new myth of place, one of homelessness: the desire is not just to describe the dissensions of discourse, but to impose them as dominant.

This desire ultimately takes her to Ellesmere Island. Rather than being fixed in place by the social strictures she is born into, she attempts to replace stasis with movement. This new myth, which reverses the privileging of home by a focus on homelessness, never arises fully formed because home/place remains "inescapable." This is, at least, partly, because there is no binary between home and away, stasis and movement: Edberg and its controlling narratives are in flux; it does not exist in parochial isolation from the rest of the world, despite how it might seem sometimes. The particularities that the speaker is born into determine, to some degree, how she can move beyond them.

Edberg cannot be made into a home for van Herk's speaker, neither can it be not-home. It is "[t]oo good to be true/too bad to be believed" (23). We read, "[g]ood people should stay here: at home. Invent Edberg as home, invent a home for it" (33). However, this possibility escapes the speaker: she is unable to invent Edberg, and must leave to prevent Edberg from completely inventing her. She wishes that she "were a Faulkner" (39) able to write Edberg into being the way that she wants it to be, to fix it in representation: "[y]ou want to command it into everlasting place like a horse or a dog, a patient animal" (37). She desires to control it in precisely the way she resents being controlled by it, but when "[y]ou look away," "it moves" (37). It cannot be a home because it both prevents her from having the freedom she desires and fails to provide the permanence it claims as mythic prairie small town.[72] She asks, "Edberg: what was missing there?" (35). Even though some unidentifiable something was missing, preventing Edberg from being/becoming a home, from reflecting her subjectivity, from providing a satisfactory place to locate herself, it continues to hail her wherever she moves, to assert influence. It remains a home that cannot be completely dislodged (37).

The speaker cannot escape from the "home" of Edberg (or Edmonton or Calgary) or "be at home" on Ellesmere merely by desiring it, or writing it. Performative speech acts are, by themselves, inadequate to establish belonging. While Deborah Keahey critiques the "traditional regionalist" view that an underlying unity exists in a place pre-discursively through a *genius loci* that simply needs to be uncovered and is capable of resolving the contradictions of existence, a simple rejection of this view is similarly insufficient. To suggest, that "of all the factors influencing the creation of home and its success or failure, land and landscape in themselves have relatively little effect or importance" (Keahey 12) is to reduce one element of particularity to the status of mere contingency.[73] It is true that "[l]iterature takes on a performative homemaking function, and poets (and novelists, and dramatists) become literary homemakers" (Keahey 4), but simply recognizing the power of story to create place is insufficient because these stories come into being in spaces that are already places, that already have histories and are written by people with histories. They come into being through engagement between the particularities of the writer and the particularities that are already in place. As van Herk says, "immigrants don't just come toward something; they leave something" ("Grace" 19), and the particularities of both what they leave and what they come to influence the stories they tell as both home-making and leave-taking. Stories do not arrive in blank, neutral, spaces, nor do their tellers appear devoid of history. Thus, a simultaneous unmaking of the exclusive myths that precede new stories must occur along with the (re-) making of place lest it merely repeat the representation of home as complete and perpetuate myth: stories of arrival, stories of struggle and resolution, stories of Canada as blank space to be written into history. Bringing this insight to her engagement with Ellesmere is what ultimately enables the speaker to avoid repeating the myth she wants to escape.

Even in the end, though, on Ellesmere, pondering death, when the speaker thinks, "[a]t last, again, you think you've found a home" (140), a place to be buried or spread ashes, she returns to a consideration of the Edberg graveyard. She remains overwritten by her history: "[i]f you could count on a family plot there, the decision would be simple, taken out of your hands; you could stop wandering, imagining sites for yourself, necessary cordons and fences" (140). The home she has left, the site of patriarchal prohibitions that she has sought to escape and resist remains a reference with the possibility of return.

However, Goldman argues, "[t]he narrator [. . .] warns that women must resist the temptation to find a final 'home'/grave/plot because there 'are murderers at large'" ("Earth-Quaking" 31). Thus, perpetual movement is advocated: by avoiding stasis women can (possibly/hopefully) escape being rendered objects/corpses/murder victims, can avoid being fixed (corrected, stuck, sterilized) in representation, like Tolstoy's Anna Karenin, turned from woman into Woman (Goldman, "Earth-Quaking" 36). The "Remainders" (29) of Edberg, though, continue to call for a return; the potential of the village promising still, even if unrecoverable: "Edberg goes on with its falling, one molecule at a time: and you too in your ache to archive it there to read/remember/blame" (39). She can do no more than document the decline while trying to avoid being caught up in it, to describe the dissensions of its discursive formation, its geografictione, without trying to resolve them into a coherent unity, to force it to stay put, like a domesticated animal. She can do no more than speak her *parole* against the "great given," the myth, the *langue*, of Edberg, without being swamped by it.[74]

One attempt to do this occurs through remembering/inventing an alternative history for Edberg. The speaker hypothesizes that

> [t]here might have been a trail passed here, that cart trail through this region partly wooded and scattered trees and coppices (J.B. Tyrrell, 1887) once, a trail that angled across the sections and quarter-sections without the ninety-degree angles of the survey crews (their muscled arms, their chains, their principles of scrutiny), a trail that led between communities, between schools, between

> stopping places and boarding houses (with their lice and good company), between general stores, between horse-barns. (13)

The focus is on the "between," the connection, rather than the divisions of surveying, or the arrival of destinations, but this connection exists in an imagined past preceding the striation of space. Goldman, discussing Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theory of rhizomatics, writes, "the shifting sands of the desert, whether sand or ice, are home to the nomad because, in the desert, there is no attempt made to enclose the landscape which is constantly changing. Even though the nomadic trajectory may follow trails or customary routes, 'it does not fulfill the function of the sedentary road' which encloses space" ("Earth-Quaking" 25). In the text, this trail around/through Edberg is only what "might have been"; Edberg has been territorialized by (male) "settlers"; its potential as space has been written into history as place, captured as excess. There are no nomads left, but there is an outside to its enclosed space, its prescribed gender roles: "[w]hat happened that you failed to marry the boy/the girl next door and settle into your parents' occupation, drive into Edberg for the mail three times a week?" (35). That is to ask how she managed to avoid capture by the mythic narrative/plot of female subjectivity. The answer is that she did not, at least completely, manage this, and, insofar as she did, she managed it by leaving. As Gabrielle Helms argues, "[i]f home signifies safety, then the plot, in both senses [as narrative trajectory and grave-site], should promise refuge and protection. However, the familiar plots of novels promise women refuge only in marriage, insanity, or death" (72). The narrator "cannot find or select a safe place because there are no safe places, no safe plots—neither graves nor fictions—for women" (73). She attempts to keep moving, to avoid emplotment, but also desires a home.

She has attempted a rejection of the narratives of female subjectivity as private, but is continually hailed by this myth. The paragraph quoted above ends with "[y]ou won't mention beer parlours. You've never crossed the doorsill of the Edberg beer parlour, still, silently forbidden to you even after several ages of consent" (14). The reality of moral and legal prohibitions asserts itself in the face of the radical indeterminacy of the liminal "in-between." The prohibitions of her youth have been internalized and that which she was "silently forbidden" from doing, she now silently forbids herself: she must leave to avoid being silenced completely/silencing herself, from being territorialized, over-written, written-over. Neuman points out that, "[f]or the woman writer, forbidden too, then, is the beer parlour tradition of oral narrative that—van Herk's fellow prairie writer, Robert Kroetsch, has argued—gave rise to prairie fiction" (n.p.). The beer parlour is a public space that is off limits to women whose "proper" sphere is the "private" life.[75] Nevertheless, while this exploration of Edberg began with home as a place to be escaped from, it ends with home as a place still calling for return: "[e]nough's enough. Come home" (40).

Even on Ellesmere the hail of Edberg continues to be enticing. Regardless of why this is, the point is that a pure deterritorialization, a pure nomadism, a pure homelessness, or a home created out of pure performativity, is both impossible and undesirable. Edberg remains "a continuous grounding." van Herk's narrator does not attain the transcendence of her particular history: Ellesmere cannot simply become home to her through the story she tells of it, because the "places far from" Ellesmere continue, inevitably and unavoidably, to make demands on her. Thus, even though there seems a necessity in leaving, because there is no space for her in the place of Edberg, there is a "remainder" that cannot be escaped or moved away from. No matter where she goes, no matter where she tries to belong, to be at home, she will carry the stories of all previous homes with her. At the same time as she recognizes the necessity and inescapability of her particularities, she attempts to extend this recognition to Ellesmere, as other, as well.[76]

Critics of van Herk's text have questioned the seeming appropriation of the north as blank space with which it ends. Goldman wonders, "whether it is sound political strategy to champion invisibility and escape, and inscribe these subversive activities on the supposedly 'blank great white page of the north.' If feminists are going to claim a territory, why appropriate a site on the margins?" ("Go North" 159). In answer to this question, as we have seen in relation to *Obasan*, it is necessary to point out that attempting to appropriate the dominant requires a sacrifice of one's own: similarly, in *Places*, we have an attempt to forge an alliance with another site of domination, the north. The north, as Bertacco shows, "is considered one of Canada's most distinctive features, the root of its icons, the source of what is truly distinctive about Canada and Canadians" (193). As such, it is not "marginal" but the centre of "our" myths and van Herk attempts to re-write these by reading to their limits: "the narrator [. . .] takes over the roles of explorer/traveler/adventurer and reconstructs them. She offers her readers a shift in perspective from an image of landscape as static and inert, waiting to be named and possessed to one of landscape in motion, fluid, requesting its explorer to move within it" (Bertacco 187). Still, this fluidity does not become an ideal opposite to stasis.

The speaker continues to look for a home. van Herk's text provides a way of interrogating the myth of identity as both the necessary means of locating ourselves and meeting the other at the border, but also threatening a repetition of mythic reification and domination. In short, the home both limits and enables, but the limits need to be continually questioned if they are to continue to enable. The escape to Ellesmere performs this questioning, even as it is tempted to impose the fixity of representation. Neuman argues that "[i]n terms of the canonical European and colonial literary discourse that van Herk seeks to counter [. . .] Ellesmere has remained, prior to her own book, inscribed only infrequently and briefly in scientific and exploration literature" (n.p.). This relative absence of appropriation by masculine discourse might simply make it more available to appropriation by feminine discourse mimicking masculine discourse while claiming to "show alternative ways *to be in place*, rejecting ideas of proprietorship and penetration of the land, for instance" (Bertacco 187). This rejection of (white, male) proprietorship can become a rejection of proprietorship in general, making Ellesmere a "tabula rasa" and ignoring the habitation of indigenous peoples.

Indigenous Limits

The repressed and effaced history of indigenous peoples who were displaced so that the "homes" of Edberg, Edmonton, and Calgary could be built is revealed in the text's first three sections and this exposure is carried onto Ellesmere. Edberg, built above the Battle River, "where the Indians dried the sun into their buffalo meat" (33), is built on top of a previous story. Uncovering the presence of this story serves to reveal an excess to the claims of belonging in Edberg. Leaving Edberg, the speaker attempts to take up this excess, to appropriate it, as a way of founding a new story of home, but it continues to exceed her possession.

In *Places Far From Ellesmere* the text's speaker leaves Edberg, finally escapes to Edmonton, the logical/linear connection (by train) from Edberg, to find a city divided against itself. Rather than a place to settle, the place that will allow her to escape her past, rather than "the city that will divide you from the country, that will wean you from Edberg" (43), Edmonton provides another impetus to keep moving between the imperfect origin of Edberg and the mythic dream of pure belonging. Like Edberg, its geography is overwritten by masculine history, and the myth this has given rise to is replete with contradictions. Goldman writes that "[a]lthough she travels to this city to get away from prohibitions, as it turns out, Edmonton—this 'once-fort, Hudson's Bay Company stronghold'—like Edberg, is structured according to a grid (52). Associated as it is with the State and State-thought, Edmonton cannot possibly satisfy the narrator's desire for escape" ("Earth-Quaking" 33). It is another, if differently, territorialized space.

We read that Edmonton was built as a "fort(ress) set up to trade/skin Indians" (43) and that "you [are] now the Indian coming with your skin" (44). This juxtaposition suggests that the historical exploitation and domination of Native peoples continues in the treatment of women and immigrants. The means by which possession of the land was taken (the construction of a network of forts separating and linking inside and outside) continues in the functioning of the modern metropolis. That is, movement to the city entails a willingness to sell/trade one's self/skin/labour, to sacrifice particularity. The speaker wonders "[w]hat choices are there?" (44), and, despite attempts to replace "the clothes you sewed" that seem "frumpy, not quite up-to-date" by buying "short skirts, baggy checked pants, [. . .] a pink corduroy suit and black blazer" still, "you always look slightly wrong, not quite as matched as the rich city girls" (51). Attaining belonging in

Edmonton threatens to homogenize difference: the speaker can claim that she is an "Indian," having experienced the "same" process of exploitative exchange.[77]

However, despite the system's desire for this homogenization, it remains incomplete. Attention is also called to the fact that this moment of origin for Edmonton is covering over a preceding history. The speaker can imagine that "you can see him [John Rowand] strutting his girth above the city he thinks he invented" (43), but the Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company's Edmonton House from 1823-1854 was only a cog in the system that imposed a new myth on the place that became Edmonton. Just as the speaker could not invent Edberg as an object, the various myths of various settler/invader groups have not been able to contain the excess of the place now called Edmonton. While the experience of a young (white) woman from Edberg, Alberta moving to Edmonton cannot be equated with that of either a contemporary or historical Native person, nor with that of an immigrant from another country, drawing an analogy among these groups extends the failure of this city's myth to account for her particularities to its failures with others' as well.

This strategy is both a resonant and troubling thread throughout the text. On the one hand it evokes the long-running desire of Anglo-European Canadian intellectuals to "become indigenous" by appropriating "Native-ness" (spirituality, culture, etc.) as a means of "belonging," and thus repeats the myth-making impetus of male discourse. On the other hand, it suggests the alienation prevalent as a result of systematic understandings of otherness. The speaker feels alienated by her need to earn money, while "[t]he others seem to need no jobs, they go to church, have children and a social life, buy furnishings" (53). That *Places* shows this simultaneous desire and alienation as an historical process (especially in the section on Calgary) suggests, to me, that the analogies with Natives are not made carelessly. Rather, they recover a continuing history of domination of women and Natives (especially of Native women) that the myth of progress has sought to mystify.

This myth of completeness is, when the speaker moves to Calgary, once again, exposed as artificial through the inclusion of the history and geography that overwrites spaces. Calgary, founded by cattle-barons—new-nomads of the prairies—was built as a city of movement and flux: "[d]esert nomads, transient denizens. Arriving and leaving, citizens of their own rules: Ex-mounties, Ex-speculators, Ex-Metis buffalo hunters, Ex-arrivals. Nomadic ranchers converging from the wide, cattle-sweeping country around" (66). The speaker desires to have a home according to her own rules, is attracted to this (nostalgic) freedom of the "wild" west, but is also aware that it is not a pure origin and only existed as a result of the preceding homes that it ex-d out. In the same vein, the speaker states that Calgary was "[b]egun by the oldest occupation, the nomadic herding of grazing animals. Ranchers unsettled, the cattle themselves moving, always moving, their cattle kingdom a transported and elegiac shuffle [. . .] Sleep on the ground, ride again in the morning. This companion of settlement. Here, this place" (68). Cattle ranching may have provided a suitable way of living in the place that became Calgary, allowing the inclusion of a diverse group of people, all escaped, disappeared, ex-d out, from their previous occupations.[78] At the same time, this nomadic herding of grazing animals supplanted a previous nomadic following of other grazing animals (buffalo) that preceded this beginning of Calgary, that was displaced by this city of new nomads.

The romanticized "cowboy" image, of nomadic followers of "their own rules," is not allowed to stand unchallenged in *Places*. It is juxtaposed with "the Sarcee woman in the Co-op store turning over running shoes (related to Deerfoot), her hair knifing over her face. You edge past her, but always want to touch that encarved posture: she knows home better than you do, she knows where it is" (68). The text is once again trying to expose the myth of a prairie home through emphasis on the past. This passage calls attention to the displacement of the indigenous peoples and their replacement on reservations that such a founding required.

This forced emplotment explicitly contrasts with the text's established desire for a self-determined feminine home in process (built according to "your" rules). The speaker claims, "to live here you must move" (69) and "[h]ome is a movement" (69). However, the building of that home by "transient denizens" escaping from other limitations depended on the destruction of a preceding home through a fixing in place, through preventing movement by restricting to reserves. The suggestion that the Sarcee woman with the running shoes knows home because she is preparing to escape, to run away in her new shoes, to enact home as movement in opposition to the city's continual appropriation of otherness, suggests a continued Native belonging that persists despite settlers re-mappings of geography. While claiming that an anonymous Sarcee woman (and how "you" know she is Sarcee is never explained) "knows home," and thereby provokes a desire to touch, makes a problematic claim about the speaker's desire to appropriate "indigeneity," it also opens the text's concerns out to another other of capitalist patriarchy.[79]

At the same time, the speaker cannot account for the difference of the Sarcee woman; her attempt to liberate all women on Ellesmere by un/reading a canonical text of European literature needs to avoid the totalizing impulse of myth and resist the urge to speak for "all women" if she is to achieve a resolution between herself and her place and hold open the possibility of also paying attention to other others. Still, the Sarcee woman is necessary to the speaker's project as she reminds the speaker of a potential home of movement in contrast to what modern Calgary has become, a potential she explores on Ellesmere.

Considering the outskirts (outsides) of Calgary, the sites of the expanding city's "appropriation" (71), van Herk writes, "[a]nd from the (far from Ellesmere) bush and parkland, Edberg, Bashaw, Tees, Lacombe (who taught you to forget Siksika), Olds and Didsbury and Carstairs a descent" (72). The second parenthesis here calls attention to the historical displacement/effacement of Natives that enabled Calgary to be built as well as the subsequent work of forgetting that is necessary for the myth of belonging to take hold. This displacement, though, was, in fact, a placement, another fixing in place, removing to reservations, which located a people/culture out of sight and allowed them to be (almost) forgotten. This remembrance, while exposing the myth of the prairies as empty blank space available for settlement and home-making also keeps Native experience on the margins: Siksika are not represented as a people or a place. They remain another other demanding the speaker's attention. However, the reference does serve to expose myth intent on denying its history.

On Ellesmere the question of indigeneity returns as Ellesmere is said to have an "other name that other beings spoke" (97). This suggests the possibility of an aboriginal name, like Siksika, that "you" have been taught to forget. Mott suggests that the erasure of an indigenous presence in *Places* repeats a colonial/colonizing effacement on the north: "[v]an Herk carelessly erases First Nations' presence in the North" (109). While this may be true to a degree, this effacement is not complete, nor, I would suggest, is it careless: "[f]orty-two hundred years ago hunting bands roamed beside the inlets and fjords of Hazen Plateau. They had a name for Ellesmere, you are sure of that" (98). This connection to the pre-contact history exposes the artificial nature of the myth of north as blank space, even if not accounting for, or explaining, a contemporary Native presence.[80] This strategy, it seems to me, succeeds in showing that Native experience has largely been effaced from the story the speaker inhabits, asks why that is the case, and avoids speaking for contemporary Native peoples as a way of establishing her own belonging.

Goldman argues that this recognition of pre-contact "hunting bands" is ironic, because "the narrator's awareness of the existence of this eclipsed name does not prevent her from describing the island as if these bands had never existed; for her, as it was for the explorers, the Arctic is imagined as a 'tabula rasa'" ("Go North" 159). But this emptiness is a construct, one of the limiting narratives that the speaker is exploring the edges of: it is too simplistic to suggest that she just "doesn't get it." Further, this irony extends to the reader; we are reminded that Ellesmere had a name before it was named by, and for, a European and before it was visited and re-imagined by Aritha van Herk. We are included in this re-imagining, one that calls attention to the history of the place even as it performs another writing/reading of it, but one that cannot extend to the status of myth because it continues to contain references outside itself—to history, Russia, Tolstoy, *Anna Karenin*, Edberg, Edmonton, Calgary, Natives (whom "you" have been taught to forget), etc. At the most basic narrative level of point of view, again, this external reference is revealed. We are told that "[t]hey had a name for Ellesmere, *you* are sure of that" (98, emphasis added), thereby including the reader as well as the speaker in the text's creation of the North as "tabula rasa," if "you" let it. The reader becomes complicit in any such construction of a tabula rasa. The north as blank space becomes one of the contested views in the struggle for a non-mythic female space.

The speaker leaves Edberg, Edmonton, and Calgary for Ellesmere Island, on which, away from the limits of "Alberta," as a community of regional boundaries eschewing (her) difference, she says she is able to "un/read self, home, Anna, the rest of Canada, all possible text" (91). The limitations of self, home, canonical literature, nationality, and narrative are questioned and, seemingly, escaped in the liminal space where "you" are both "on Ellesmere Island" and "in Russia" (91), but Ellesmere is, at the same time, "the closest you can get to Anna's Russia and still remain at home [. . .] the closest you can get to home and still read Russia" (113). There remains a reliance on "home"—a concept bound by the restrictive discourses that the speaker seeks to transcend on Ellesmere—in facilitating whatever degree of escape that is possible, and that escape from "the home" to "home" remains incomplete as Ellesmere is only "the closest you can get." Heim describes this passage as "a form of moving through discursive space. Such movement is never fully predictable because any discursive space is structured in complex and conflictual ways. Thus it becomes possible for us to imagine ourselves reading our way to the edges of our discursive universe in order to get a sense of its placed and finite nature, and perhaps to get an idea of what it borders on" (135). The speaker is not fully "on" Ellesmere, as she is still partly "at home" in the narratives of Edberg, Edmonton, and

Calgary (in "Canada"), and is not fully "in" Russia because this "undiscovered place" (113) has been discovered before, has been written before. All the speaker can do is explore the boundaries and occasionally peek at what lies beyond.

The Limits of Ellesmere

Even though a return south is not depicted in the book, the title's emphasis on "places far from" suggests that the text's value is in destabilizing the hierarchies, the identities, of modern technological society by contrasting "southern" places with Ellesmere. Sherrill E. Grace suggests that *Places*, "celebrates its own ability to *imagine* and *construct* woman as Ellesmere and on Ellesmere, free to move about Ellesmere and, thus, able to free Anna—all women—from the essentialist heterosexuality (which invites, but punishes female adulterers) of patriarchal binaries. Anna (and Aritha) go north to reclaim themselves" (172). Ellesmere, then, to a degree, attains the status of ideal opposite of the southern, patriarchal dominant, a blank space off the map where female subjectivity can freely inscribe itself anew.

However, the contrast is not absolute between home and away, self and other: the experience of the outside is dependent upon the inside. The book's cover may represent Ellesmere as a woman, but it is a woman overwritten by place names (even if illegible) and lines of longitude; the Ellesmere section may be subtitled "woman as island" (77), but it is an island within a global system of satellite tracking and air travel (that allows privileged "tourists" to visit and experience "authentic" wilderness). It is only by abstracting from the complicit reality of Ellesmere, by erasing the indigenous presence and the history of colonial territorialization, that the myth of its idealism can be created, and van Herk's text is too aware of similarities between the north's patriarchal history and that of the south to let this occur in a simplistic way, to allow Ellesmere to yield a singular meaning.[81]

As Neuman points out, "the historical and masculinist formulations of what a woman's 'life' might be [. . .] leave traces everywhere in the text" (n.p.). These traces continue on to Ellesmere; rather than a "tabula rasa" Ellesmere is "contestatory" space: "[i]t is a space in which its author attempts to win for herself—against the roles for heroines in the 'GREAT writing' and against the modes of much of women's autobiographical representation—an 'original life' [. . .] to follow the thread of bios from birth to death on her own terms" (Neuman n.p.). To do this "on her own terms," though is to repeat a convention of GREAT, i.e. "male," writing: it is to write as the subjective hero free from dependency. This "original life," though, continues to be influenced by the "GREAT writing" and modes of thought borne with the speaker to Ellesmere, even if they are "exactly what you wish to leave behind in lower Canada" (81). The contestation that occurs in *Places*, it seems to me, involves a recognition of dependence on otherness and an abjection by the speaker of the subjective desire to do things "on her own terms." This recognition occurs on Ellesmere.

Indeed, the speaker in *Places* makes claims to achieving escape/transcendence, through isolation, from the limits of home, discourse, patriarchy on Ellesmere, but a close reading reveals that the speaker continues to be exposed to community at her limits. Despite what Neuman tells us about the etymology of "discourse," its potential to offer a means of escape is incomplete:

> Dis ('from') + correre ('to run'), my Webster's tells me, gives us discourse: 'to run from.' 'You too can jump,' the narrator concludes (72). To a genre-blurring book the major trope of which is Ellesmere, an 'absence, a hesitation where you can pretend there are no telephones in the world, no newspapers, no banks, no books' (77). No discursive structures, in short. To an Inuit island, an indigenous site that ruptures the canonical readings by which western cultures have constituted themselves and have marked women [. . .] if no man is an island, the possibility remains that a woman might be. The narrator imagines Ellesmere, in its Arctic fastness, not as a community, but as a 'tabula rasa' (77). (n.p.)

However, we continue to have the always exposed and indeterminate pronoun "you," opening beyond the individual at the most basic level. Further, even when we read, for instance, "[h]er island, tabula rasa, awayness so thoroughly truant you have cut all connexion [sic] to all places far from Ellesmere" (77), the "her" remains ambiguous, possibly referring to the island itself, but also referring to Anna Karenin, which creates a connection to one of Ellesmere's outsides, that of a nineteenth century Russian novel: the stories the speaker brings to Ellesmere exceed its isolation.

Similarly, while we are told that "[y]ou are only a body, here in this Arctic desert" (77), and the speaker expresses a strong misanthropy, claiming "[y]ou want to put as much space between *yourselves* and the camp as you can manage, even the few (only five or six) tents there too much, too many people, smells and voices of humans grating and unbearable" (94, emphasis added), absolute isolation is never achieved. The ostensibly singular subject "you" reveals its plurality in the object position as "yourselves." And then, upon crossing the Snow Goose River, we read "[y]ou have left everything behind now, all other humans, in crossing isolated yourself from even a suggestion of people" (100). Nevertheless, even though the object is the singular "yourself" here, her silent male companion cannot be effaced entirely: "Bob tests the different channels through the rocky bed. [. . .] Bob carries the packs across and then comes back for you" (99). Physical limits are exposed here through the external assistance of another person. That the person is male (and a fictionalized version of van Herk's husband) may raise questions about continuing patriarchal presence, but, more significantly, I think, it shows the continued necessity of particularity and community in moving toward the universal. Her experience of "freedom" comes about through particularities: her particular body; her particular family; her particular man. It is not a vision of individual, impermeable, independence.

Unlike in *No Fixed Address*, where Arachne must disappear to remain herself, the speaker in *Places* maintains relationships, in discourse, even as she explores limits. Even though "Ellesmere is absence" (77), where "you" can claim there are no discursive structures, as Neuman states, and the speaker finds it comforting that "no one can rescue you" (104), this absence only exists, as pure absence, through an act of imagination represented in discourse. The claim that "[y]ou are only a body" (77) on Ellesmere is exposed as fiction because it is achieved through fiction (story-telling), the discursive construct that has represented and continues to try to represent the north as blank space. All other humans have not been left behind literally, let alone figuratively. In addition to the generally unspoken presence of Bob, there is the omnipresent, extensively discussed, and meditated upon, presence of Tolstoy and Anna Karenin. Thus, the claims to universality are only made by abstracting from the particularities of the situation, and the particularities continually reassert themselves (the speaker carries discursive structures, stories, community, within her).

Rather than suggesting this as a criticism of the text, I am arguing that this models the necessary interplay between particularity and universality, the positive wavering that opens toward the good. While van Herk may want to hold out the possibility that, as Neuman would have it, while "no man is an island, the possibility remains that a woman might be," the co-existence that persists at the moment of apparent escape reveals that community is inescapable, even for women, even on Ellesmere. Ellesmere, "woman as island" (van Herk 77) may provide the "solitude necessary" to "understand the world" (Camus qtd. in van Herk n.p.), but it only provides it as a moment in story. This moment is necessary for a recognition that her particularity is "endangered, that it *should* be preserved and extended" (Angus, *Border* 160), but it only occurs as a moment in the interplay between particularity and universality as it also requires that "such a right be extended to *others* as well" (160). And, further, this particularity depends upon others, depends upon its placement within a community, within co-existence.

The conclusion to this geografictione, then, rather than advocating the creation of a female myth to counter the dominant male myth, refuses to become self-sustaining, referring only to itself: it remains permeable and vulnerable to its outside. There remains an outside, which continually interrupts the establishment of a female myth, and which, ultimately, asserts itself fully when the text reaches its limit/end: the narrator never becomes indigenous to or belongs on Ellesmere; Ellesmere never becomes the absence "you" desire.

Mott argues that van Herk "reproduces the image of the North as a blank space, one available for an escape and a new mythology" (109). He argues that van Herk represents the North, and Canada more generally in *Places* and elsewhere, as "ready to be mythologized" (109). This may be true elsewhere, but in *Places* it is the myth that already adheres to Edberg, Edmonton, and Calgary, even Ellesmere, that she is trying to escape, by revealing its limits, and, even if an alternate myth may appear to be the ideal goal, it is continually interrupted through the presence of particularities exposing complicity. The myth of the north as blank space is one of the myths being contested. The representation does not deny this interruption of myth, seeking to mystify it, but exposes the contestation between home and homelessness and locates itself at the limit between them. As Senkpiel argues, van Herk "announces that one of the principal impediments to [. . .] explorations of the North are earlier literary mappings or geographies of it" (125). She may want it to be blank space, but she has to account, somehow, for the namings that precede her, the particularities of place as well as the particularities of self that enable a reading of place. Mott concludes that "in the end both masculine northerns and *Places Far From Ellesmere* construct the north as a blank space ready to be inscribed with southern narratives—in other words, ready to be colonized by the southern Euro-Canadian imagination. Eventually, van Herk falls back into the trap she aspires to avoid" (110). By contrast, Senkpiel claims that van Herk's text marks a "shift from myth and convention to the particularity of experience" and, along with this "comes a change in language. Gone is the masculine, heroic language of exploration. Gone is the masculine arrogance. In its place is an altogether more human, more colloquial, humbler language—a new openness" (131). Claiming that these elements are "gone" is overstating the case, as we have seen—they remain necessary as the means by which the text performs its resistance of them—but their position of dominance has been called into question and destabilized: they no longer appear self-sufficient, but open onto their outsides. This questioning calls our attention to the structures of dominance that attempt to remain invisible, but it does not result in their elimination.

In the end, the speaker, the reader, and Anna are murdered on Ellesmere: "Anna murdered, you murdered" (142). The dominance of the murderers of language, the myths of patriarchal capitalism, which seek to appropriate systems' excesses as a profitable yield, have not been (fully) displaced: the text, because it is not myth, has a limit and calls attention to it. Again the pronoun use is significant, as it states in one reading that both Anna and "you" have been murdered, but in another that "you" have murdered Anna, revealing the complicity of the speaker and the reader with apparatuses of power. The attempt at un/reading *Anna Karenin* has not succeeded, because, despite the contradictions, and despite the revelation that Tolstoy murders Anna because she writes (137)[82] the abstract ideal of Anna's escape to Ellesmere is unfulfilled because the particularities of Tolstoy's text, and the discursive structures and system of society more generally, cannot be escaped entirely. Similarly, the potential for Ellesmere to provide a haven of absence for other women threatened by the murder of/by language is limited by its history of patriarchal possession.

At the same time, the potential for un/reading these murders is deferred into the future (which is the process of deconstruction). We read, "this islanded woman *waiting* to be read a justice or a future" (143, emphasis added). Ellesmere is no longer waiting "to be named and possessed" (Bertacco 187), but it is still waiting, now for the conditions of reciprocity that will allow its particularities and the particularities of others to co-exist in a condition of justice, a condition in which the subjective desire for domination is abjected through respect for the other. Ellesmere is waiting for the other others to claim their territory in a process that will respect its difference. Justice and futurity have not been achieved by the speaker's endeavour on Ellesmere; the ideal of a blank space of freedom has not been found by the text's end (the very fact that the text comes to an end, no matter how indeterminate, suggests its failure to escape limits absolutely), but the potential of un/reading is deferred for "you" to take up. A synthesis of inside and outside is thus avoided and there is "a letting go of the desire to be completely in charge of human universality" (Angus, *Border* 161).

The geografictione's final statement, "Oh Anna" (143), then, is resonant in its multiplicity. It is a lament for Anna's death, a recognition of the necessity of abandoning closure, an apology to Anna and the reader for failing to free them from discourse, a cry of joy in achieving the connection of community between "you" and Anna at the limit of discourse, a cry of mourning and loss for Anna's "terrible violation" by Tolstoy's "iron writing" (142), a good-bye. Such multiplicity enacts a deferral of closure, depends on the reader to continue the un/reading of myths that the speaker has begun, refuses to enclose Ellesmere in "great black steel lines of fiction" (Wiebe, qtd. in Goldman, "Earth-Quaking" 22), accepts that others' will access universality through their own.

Chapter Five: Cracking the Limits of Discourse: Stories and Silence in *Green Grass, Running Water*

> The male west has to be earth-quaked a little, those black steel lines and the looming giant toppled. Not destroyed, oh no, but infiltrated.
>
> *Aritha van Herk*, "Women Writers and the Prairie: Spies in an Indifferent Landscape" (1984)

> As Westerners found their hope in an imaginable future, they turned more and more to mastery; their concentration on mastery eliminated from their minds any partaking in time other than as future. Equally, the clarification of this conception of time by thinkers and the intensified making of novelty by practical men were mutually interdependent. As Europeans achieved more and more mastery through their works, thinkers increasingly defined time as history. As words such as 'progress' and 'history' were placed in the centre of the most comprehensive thought, so practical men were encouraged thereby to justify their conquests as the crown of human activity. Also [. . .] we North Americans whose ancestors crossed the ocean were, because of our religious traditions and because this continent was experienced as pure potentiality (a tabula rasa), the people most exclusively enfolded in the conception of time as progress and the exaltation of doing what went with it. We were to be the people who, after dominating two European wars, would become the chief leaders in establishing the reign of technique throughout all the planet and perhaps beyond it.
>
> *George Grant*, Time as History (1969)

Within this view of progressive "time as history," this myth that continually seeks to deny its outside, the West has sought mastery over otherness. It is a white, male myth. This is the myth that van Herk wants, as a woman, to "earthquake," to "infiltrate."[83] In *Green Grass, Running Water* Thomas King comes at the myth from a Native perspective and exposes other limits to it: an indigenous understanding of order and a concept of the sacred that is unrecognizable within a belief in time as history. The reign of technique, the universal and homogenous state, human freedom to control chance, has still not, yet, been established throughout the entire world. King's novel shows this myth of technique, of mastery, at work and explores the limits of that myth in search of stories that can resist it by pointing toward its outsides, the excesses on which it depends. Although these outsides cannot be represented without creating new inside/outside binaries, stories that touch upon them create tremors, send shock-waves through the myth, open gaps that reveal the continuation of otherness without dominating it. Unpredictable natural phenomena such as earthquakes prove the persistence of an outside to the reign of technique. King's use of an earthquake to resolve the impasse between Eli Stands Alone and Duplessis International Associates shows that excess persists beyond technological domination of nature and allows him to infiltrate that narrative and make a space within the dominant narrative for other kinds of difference as well.[84] This exposure of gaps in totalizing structures occurs repeatedly in the novel and while it would be worth exploring many more examples than is possible here (I will focus on the dam, the Map, and the Sun Dance), the important thing is that King exposes these gaps through story. To understand what is opened by the cracks of earthquakes, what lies beyond structure, what can be glimpsed at the limits of discourse, "we" need to examine the role of stories in the novel.[85]

Stories and Limits: Speaking Toward Silence

In much of his fiction King explores how the Blackfoot, who inhabit land on either side of the Canada-U.S. border, are divided and controlled by that border: their unity is limited and difference imposed. However, the limiting potential of borders does not lead King to advocate limitless border-crossing as an alternative. Indeed, the primacy of the "frontier thesis," in the settlement of the "New World" by Europeans, displaced Native peoples and destroyed much of Native culture precisely through belief in such a story of limitlessness. The story of "limitless progress" fails to account for, among other things, Native particularities.[86] King defends these particularities while attempting, at the same time, to destabilize the hierarchies that exclude Natives from the "universal."

King's writing is sometimes considered in terms of postmodernism, which, itself, is often linked to border-crossing. If we understand postmodernism as being characterized by the "blend[ing of] literary genres, cultural and stylistic levels, the serious and playful," then *Green Grass*, at least, fits the definition; if it also involves efforts to "subvert the foundations of our accepted modes of thought and experience so as to reveal the meaninglessness of existence" (Abrams 168), then the novel, at least partially, critiques this view. It may subvert "the foundations of accepted modes of thought" but not for the purpose of exposing meaninglessness. It exposes something else. William Corlett argues that

> [p]ostmodernism, a name associated with Foucault and Derrida, sometimes indicates the abandonment of structure, but this abandonment can be misleading. If used in the sense of deserting completely or giving up the notion of structure, *abandon* summons images of the nihilistic, the apolitical, the trivial, or worse. Names like Foucault and Derrida can, however, be drawn closer to political discourse by using *abandon* in the sense of losing self-control, or giving in to the accidental, chaotic aspect of structure, to examine their binary oppositions for signs of play. Postmodern writing plays with abandon, then, by challenging uniformity, by searching for cracks in the foundations of political and social thinking. (3)

Both senses of "abandon" signify in "postmodernism," though, and while abandoning oneself to the chaos within structures and exposing them as arbitrary constructs may be "an interesting exercise" (King, "Border Trickery" n.p.) it will lead to an apolitical quietism if it is not linked to a particular hegemonic practice, a new structure, a new story[87]. King seeks out these cracks, but his purpose is not to abandon the reader to a chaos beyond structure. He finds room to play within binary structures, but recognizes that technique depends upon capturing that excessive play for its expansion; technique seeks to make playful excess useful, it seeks to make it yield (in both the sense of "submit" and "generate a profit"). Therefore, he is committed to establishing a new order, one that subordinates this technique of capture to "the self-organization" of specific communities (Angus, *Border* 184).

George Grant argues, that "for the ancients thought was at its height, not in action, but in what they called a passion. Whatever the differences in what came to us from Jerusalem and from Athens, on this central point there was a commonness. The height for man [sic] was a passion. In modern language we may weakly describe this by saying that thought was finally a receptivity" (*Time* 60). While Grant's "us" is not the same as King's, this quotation reveals that the sense of "abandon" as loss of self-control is not a uniquely "post-modern" one. The difference is that for Corlett it is a suggestion of an abandonment to chaos, but for Grant, and, I will argue, King, it is an abandonment to cosmos: giving up self-control creates gaps in which this cosmos can appear. Grant argues, "I do not understand how one could love fate [as Nietzsche suggests], unless within the details of our fates there could appear, however rarely, intimations that they are illumined; intimations, that is, of perfection (call it if you will God) in which our desires for good find their rest and their fulfillment" (*Time* 60). These intimations of perfection are precisely what are offered to Lionel and Charlie by the four Old Indians in

Green Grass and enable them to rethink the lives they have been living as modern subjects. In contrast to Grant's tradition, though, this rethinking starts from a rediscovery of the value in their Blackfoot particularities.

This rediscovery of particularity exposes the play that continues in a post-modernity that has become overly systematic. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari establish the figure of the rhizome as a non-hierarchical structure, arguing that, "[the rhizome] is not a question of this or that place on earth, or of a given moment in history, still less of this or that category of thought. It is a question of a model that is perpetually in construction or collapsing, and of a process that is perpetually prolonging itself, breaking off and starting up again" (20). But, Franco Rella asks, "[w]hat, in fact, is more rhizomatic, more uncontainable, overflowing and uncontrollable than imperialism itself?" (43). In *Green Grass*, while the model of the world is perpetually in process, as the novel begins and ends with attempts to tell "the story" of the world correctly and is structured as a number of narratives perpetually breaking off and starting up again, it also remains, importantly, a question of "this place on earth," of a particular space's particular history: the relationship between individuals' particular histories and an iterative process of belonging and abjection structures the novel and explains the world. It is important both that when Eli returns to the Sun Dance, after being away for years, he finds his mother's lodge where it "had always been" (203) and that exactly why this is important is never made explicit. We have, in the novel, both uncontainable and overflowing excess and the concept of order, an order that is beyond human apprehension and comprehension (and representation), which is not oriented toward human ends, but in which intimations of the perfection of that order are possible. This particular history extends beyond the notion of man-made history as progress and suggests another tradition, available to some, that does not look back to Europe or the Middle East for its origin. This history is neither modern technological man nor Grant's alternative of maintaining Athens and Jerusalem. It points to another order, one not of human making but in which humans take part.

Rather than understanding the novel as "postmodern," then, Robin Ridington claims that, "Tom King's work is neo-premodern" (35), explaining in a footnote that this term,

> could make sense only to a person already exposed to the pasticherie of postmodernism. People who lived before the 'modern' era obviously did not think of themselves as pre-modern. While they cannot know about us, we can know about them. We can recognize a resonance between ourselves and people who never experienced the modernist agenda. Tom King plays upon this possibility. His Old Indians are pre-moderns held captive by American modernism, but they are also the thoroughly anachronistic Thought Woman, Old Woman, First Woman, and Changing Woman. Their time transcends our own and circles back to touch it. By masking them in the icons of modernism, King reveals himself to be a neo-premodernist. (36)

This term is, in my opinion, worth appropriating, but it needs to be done with caution. A similar notion can be found in the work of Marshall McLuhan, who suggested in the 1960s, in his now troublingly primitivist rhetoric, that the contemporary era would be one of "re-tribalization." By this McLuhan foresaw a return to the kinds of social organizations that preceded the modern period, expressed in his famous metaphor of the "global village." Angus also articulates the need, after modernism, for a "step back"

(*Border* 201) to reveal that "the interpretive circle of the Same occurs through domestication, which has meant the construction of cultural continuity *against* nature" (201). However, while McLuhan saw re-tribalization being achieved *through* technology, by the completion of the modernist project of domination leading to emancipation, Angus, Ridington, Grant, and King question this belief and the assumptions of its underlying project. The premodern world was not an idyllic golden age that can be recovered, but it did understand the world differently and consideration of this difference, and its continuation, can offer a way to question modernity's representations of its own inevitability. In opposition to the modern project of homogenization and domination, these thinkers articulate the necessity of limit by recognizing the connection between the human community and nature, which involves an understanding of diversity rather than sameness. This diversity becomes apparent in the novel's story-telling strategies.

When the Lone Ranger tries to begin the creation story with "*In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.* And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (14), Ishmael corrects him, saying, "That's the wrong story [. . .] That story comes later" (14). It is crucial that the Judeo-Christian origin, its creation story, "comes later" in the story of Native peoples. As King explains in interview,

> [w]hen I was working on *Green Grass* I began with the idea that I was going to start in the Garden of Eden and work my way forward from there. But I couldn't get going and the reason I couldn't get going was because I was basing this world I was trying to create on Christian precepts. It was only when I said, hey wait a minute, what if the Garden of Eden comes much later in the story of Creation and

> what if the real story is the Native story and the Christian story is the secondary story? And as soon as I said that it opened up the entire book to me, as it were, and I just went racing through it. I couldn't write it fast enough. (King, "Border Trickery")

Beginning with the Biblical story of origin serves to efface a preceding history and to naturalize the colonial encounter between settler/invaders and Natives as the "real" start of history in the "new" world. King's series of beginnings reverses this process. The four old Indians' various attempts at beginning the creation story—"*Once upon a time...*" (11), "*A long time ago in a faraway land...*" (12), "*Many moons comechucka...*" (13)—play with ways in which settler/invader storytelling in North America has ignored and/or appropriated the Native stories that preceded them. This multiplicity reveals that, as Homi Bhabha explains, "[f]ixity as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourses of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy, and daemonic repetition" (66). King's multiple beginnings reveal the construction of "Indians" in discourse.

Yet suggesting sheer multiplicity is not the point; it is crucial that the reader recognize what precedes the beginnings of white settler/invaders: there is a suggestion of underlying unity. This does not mean, though, that there is a universal origin for North America that can be appropriated by anyone, nor is it an origin on which a myth can be founded. Rather, it suggests that some beginnings are more appropriate than others because they are one's own in ways that others are not. However, this depends on a respect for the otherness of others' beginnings. Angus explains, that "to the extent that I am drawn into a universalizing discourse justifying my own identity, then precisely to that extent will I be drawn out to recognize the identity of the Other. The Other remains Other, as I remain attached to my own in a manner distinct from the culture of Others" (*Border* 162). The beginnings that Robert Kroetsch looks back to, for instance, are his own and explain his position as an Alberta writer, but they are neither universal nor essential, even though they are necessary as the means by which he can access something of the universal.[88] King has access to other beginnings that are outside of Kroetsch's story, that are Other to it. It is important, if "the story" is to be told correctly, if it is to be different, if it is to avoid simply repeating "the great-given, the sum total of words and grammar and concluded speech" (Kroetsch, *Lovely* 19), that one begin in the right place, that is, in a place that is "one's own." Therefore, the Lone Ranger's claim that, "[e]verybody makes mistakes" (14) is dismissed with "[b]est not to make them with stories" (14). Making mistakes with stories leads to *parole* being swamped by *langue*. King's novel shows the struggle between these two sides of language and the impossibility of understanding them as a simple binary.

On the fifth try, the story is begun properly with the words of a Cherokee divining ritual (Flick 144): "Gha! [. . .] Higayv:ligé:i" (15). This, and the following un-translated, un-footnoted, un-explained Cherokee, serves to exclude most readers from this part of the text, to point to a beginning outside of the Judeo-Christian narrative or the Greco-Roman tradition or the Enlightenment scientific-rational explanation of the world. For non-Native readers this beginning must remain Other, even if the Cherokee is translated: understanding that these words are the first words of a divining ritual points to their source, their origin, but does not provide access to or understanding of that ritual, its meaning, or the culture that created it.[89]

While King has claimed that he set out to write "a kind of pan-Indian novel, something that looks at something larger than just the specifics of a local area" (King, "Peter Gzowski Interview" 66), he achieves this, necessarily, *through* the specifics of a local area. The novel is about, among other things, resisting the striation of both human and non-human nature (which is embodied most concretely, literally in concrete, in the Grand Baleen Dam), through the imposition of borders. These borders are constructed in discourse and seek to make otherness yield. The novel, then, uses discourse to reveal gaps in those borders; these gaps allow movement between the particular and the universal and back again. Border-crossing never becomes an end in itself: it remains necessary to maintain borders and silences and to defend the particular. Human agency is represented as enfolded within a larger order—"the absurdities of time [. . .] are to be taken not simply as history, but as enfolded in an unchanging meaning, which is untouched by potentiality or change" (Grant, *Time* 60)—a universal that cannot be known or represented in its totality but is nearest in the particularities of "home."[90] The threats posed to the Sun Dance in the novel by the dominant myth do not threaten this order, but do threaten the means by which the Native characters access it, by which they locate themselves in the world.

Even though Jennifer Andrews argues that, "King is able to break down the boundaries between the sacred and the secular" ("Reading" 104), King is not indifferent to this distinction. She claims that, "[r]ather than separating the mythological narrative from the events occurring in Blossom, King closes the distance between these two worlds in his text and thus forces his readers to continue to cut across borders" ("Reading" 113), but she also maintains that, through the use of untranslated passages in Cherokee, "King prevents non-Cherokee readers from cultivating a relationship of complete intimacy with the narrative and, thus, ensures that certain ceremonies and rituals remain sacred" ("Reading" 95). Similarly, the text does not attempt to represent certain things; we are not told why Eli came home, and what happens in the double tepee at the Sun Dance is never described. As Eli says, to tell such things "straight out [. . .] Wouldn't make any sense. Wouldn't be much of a story" (361). Or, as Norma puts it, "[a]lways best to figure those things out for yourself" (422). A boundary between sacred and secular remains: the exploration of this limit is central to the text and occurs through story. Rather than "breaking down" or "cutting across" borders, King reveals cracks in the totalizing narrative of individual autonomy (which denies borders' existence) and shows the playful, creative exchange that occurs at the opening. Ultimately, Andrews is right to conclude that "King is particularly skilled at manipulating and revising the borders that divide Natives from non-Natives. His brand of humour attempts to bring disparate groups of readers together yet still respect the individuality of various tribes and communities" ("Reading" 112). This respect depends on the recognition of the importance of borders; crossing borders remains a complex ethical negotiation rather than one of indifference. King questions the ethics of border-crossing and asks us to pay attention to who creates borders and for what purposes. This negotiation occurs, "ethically," as we will see, in the process of story-telling itself and is suggested by the form of the novel.

The parts of the novel are synecdochic; they continually suggest a whole: "[e]ach story, like each piece of a hologram, contains information about the entire structure of which it is a part" (Ridington 19). Thus, the parts of the novel are universalizing—they open out to suggest a larger unity. However, while synecdochal structure provides multiple entrances (that might be called rhizomatic) to readers of various backgrounds, since "[n]o single reader will understand all the references" (Ridington 20), not all doors are open (the universal whole suggested by the parts does not become available; it is only intimated). The order suggested by this synecdoche exceeds human order; all human ordering is shown to be particular, dependent, and incomplete. This can be understood as an eco-systemic model of unity, and it structures the novel.

In North America, the narrative of progress depends heavily on the opposition of civilization (order) and wilderness (disorder), but "the relation between wilderness and civilization is not that of an opposition. Both wilderness and civilization are forms of order; the difference is that one is oriented towards human interests and the other is not [. . .] the deconstruction of domestication shows that it replaces order with order" (Angus, *Border* 203). The synecdochic structure provides a suggestion of unity, but there always remains an excess that escapes human ordering, that prevents individual readers from "mastering" the text. Further, none of the characters have access to everything;[91] while the old Indians' time may transcend our time, they do not transcend story and are limited by their particularities. They function within narrative and the working of power through narrative controls and limits them. Despite Mark Shackleton's claim, that "the four Indians [. . .] literally control the plot and rewrite the master narratives" (263), their powers of control are necessarily limited. When watching *The Mysterious Warrior* they think they have already "fixed this one" (320) and complain "this is sure a lot of work" (320). Master narratives are not replaced, but the excess that exceeds mastery is gestured toward. That is, neither "master" narratives nor the old Indians achieve or possess mastery over excess; if the Indians were able to "control the plot" they would become the foundation for a new master narrative. They do not replace the "Cowboy and Indians" story, the frontier mythology, but expose it as a story by changing it in particular instances.

The Limits of Colonizing Narratives

Green Grass, Running Water uses stories to resist hegemonic discourse and mediate between particularity and universality, to show the cracks in human order that are susceptible to earthquakes. Stories, in the novel, repeat dominant discourse as a way of questioning it in a way that is both complicit and resistant. The novel opens, for instance, with a parody of the Genesis creation story that serves as a microcosm for the novel. We read:

> So.
>
> In the beginning there was nothing. Just the water.
>
> Coyote was there, but Coyote was asleep. That Coyote was asleep and that Coyote was dreaming. When that Coyote dreams, anything can happen.
>
> I can tell you that. (1)

There is a repetition of the Biblical "in the beginning" but it is preceded by the word "so," suggestive of "an ongoing conversational gambit" (Smith 66): the notion of creation *ex nihilo* is disrupted by the addition of "just the water," which precedes creation.[92] Analogously, the novel is not self-contained. The reader is inserted in a conversation that apparently began some time ago. This moment of "pure origin" is then further disrupted by the addition of "Coyote," who is also present before creation and before God. As we go on, we learn that Coyote in fact gives birth to God through a dream that gets out of hand. Thus, the novel can be read as a series of attempts to (re-)tell the creation story correctly and rectify the consequences of Coyote's destructive dream (the Judeo-Christian/mono-theistic God).[93] The novel's opening deliberately defamiliarizes the reader from the dominant societal discourse by calling into question the origins of the world in which we live, doubling them, and deferring them to an unknown prior moment, while, at the same time, deferring the resolution of this complexity into the future. This is not a world in which, "all creative power is vested in a single deity who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent" (King, *Truth* 24). It does not begin with a purposeful thought and a rational ordering, but a dream: God, as the embodiment of pure reason, is not the origin. This does not mean that the world is chaos, only that its order is not, and cannot be understood as, "rational."[94] It is ordered and disordered by stories, and learning what stories to tell and how to tell them becomes the primary concern.

The "in the beginning" makes the story recognizable to readers steeped in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but it is also made strange by the presence of Coyote and an involved narrator. The novel begins with a creation story that incorporates the linear Judeo-Christian story of Genesis 1, but subordinates it to or incorporates it within a circular, oral, and non-teleological story of Coyote dreaming; it makes many readers who are normally insiders into outsiders. Rather than "the Judaeo-Christian idea that history is the divinely ordered process of man's salvation" (Grant, *Philosophy* 40), we have a story in which "the pivotal concern is not with the ascendancy of good over evil but with the issue of balance" (King, *Truth* 24). Thus the story is not a myth, not the means by which a pre-given and universal truth can be understood and possessed if one only has "eyes to see and ears to hear"; rather, it is a cooperative story in which human agency is necessary for the process but is never completely in charge of it.[95]

This displacement of the Biblical origin mirrors King's insistence on the history of Native peoples before colonization in "Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial":

> While post-colonialism purports to be a method by which we can begin to look at those literatures which are formed out of the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor, the colonized and the colonizer, the term itself assumes that the starting point for that discussion is the advent of Europeans in North America. At the same time, the term organizes the literature progressively suggesting that there is both progress and improvement. No less distressing, it also assumes that the struggle between guardian and ward is the catalyst for contemporary Native literature, providing those of us who write with method and topic. And, worst of all, the idea of post-colonial writing effectively cuts us off from our traditions, traditions that were in place before colonialism ever became a question, traditions which have come down to us through our culture in spite of colonization, and it supposes that contemporary Native writing is largely a construct of oppression. (12)

King's rewriting of the Biblical origin story serves to illustrate how it functions as a colonial narrative (by cutting Native peoples off from their traditions) while subverting its universalist claims. However, although this beginning interrupts Biblical "truth," Coyote's dog dream believes itself to be God and the Native characters quickly find themselves living in a world ordered according to His rules. The disorder and irrationality of Coyote, although original, are displaced by the "order" and "rationality" of God and

His “Christian rules” (69), the pre-modern displaced by the modern. The struggle to maintain what is marginalized and threatened by the human order that arises from faith in the rationality of God is a primary challenge for the characters in the novel.

The opening “so” suggests the orality of conversation, but while Smith follows Bhabha in suggesting that orality, “resists hegemony and encourages more ‘hybrid,’ and communal worldviews” (72), this hybridity is a game that not all of the characters are able to play to their own ends. The limits of the resistance of this hybridity become clear in the novel as the four old Indians must take on canonical white identities to reduce the amount of time in which they are incarcerated. While this mimicry is effective, to a degree, for the mythic characters (who are shown not to have any other options), it is not, as we will see, a viable option for the realist characters.

Following Judith Butler, Arnold E. Davidson et al. argue that, “the reiteration of dominant discourse in another fashion effects a performative subversion” (68). Thus, when Eli reads *The Mysterious Warrior*, a formulaic Western, he repeats the dominant discourse, but his advance knowledge of what will happen undercuts the effectiveness of that kind of writing (i.e. myth). Similarly, *Green Grass, Running Water*’s opening and its subsequent uses of Biblical and literary canonical stories perform this subversion. Assumptions regarding what will happen when First Woman finds herself in the Garden of Eden are undercut when she decides to leave rather than submit to a God (Coyote’s contrary “Dog Dream”) who is unwilling to share (69). Despite the refusal of the old Indians to “play the part of the mimic” (Horne 261) in Biblical and canonical narratives, they are eventually forced to adopt mimicked identities to avoid permanent imprisonment.

While King's creative mis-readings of the canon undercut a hegemonic form, they do not suggest the need, or possibility, to escape form entirely: "some boundaries must be maintained, for without them, the marginalized become hegemonized within the dominant" (Davidson et al 71). Or, as Corlett interprets Derrida, "[i]n a world where everything is neutralized, the status quo wins" (197). In the end, "postmodern models, though seemingly generous and egalitarian, often cultivate 'indifference' or complete ignorance of those borders and boundaries that actually protect and sustain otherwise marginalized populations" (Davidson et al 74). The repetition of stories, therefore, subverts the assumptions of the dominant stories, but it does not suggest a move to transcend narrative or representation or even to replace these stories with "new" ones. Escape as a strategy of resistance, avoiding the confines of representation, is limited.

The mythic Indians—First Woman, Thought Woman, Changing Woman, and Old Woman—avoid conflict by "escaping" to alternate stories, but, wherever they go, they find themselves in narrative, and, since there are no stories that have not been colonized, they end up in prison because "[b]eing Indian" (72) is a crime. There is no outside to the text in this sense. Wherever one goes, power functions through ideology in the form of narrative. Slavoj Zizek explains: "it is possible to assume a place that enables us to maintain a distance from it [ideology], *but this place from which one can denounce ideology, must remain empty, it cannot be occupied by any positively determined reality*—the moment we yield to this temptation, we are back in ideology" (17). At the same time, though, this place outside ideology can be imagined and intimations of it can appear through re-presentation. It is precisely these intimations that King suggests at the limits of discourse, at the point where an alternative depends on the reader. The four Old

Indians, in "trying to fix up the world" (123), help to generate these gaps that allow this outside to be imagined, but the form that this imagining takes depends on the reader's ability to see the outside that the representation is pointing toward. This pointing occurs on multiple levels in the novel.

In their attempts to escape prison and find gaps to inhabit within discourse, First Woman, Thought Woman, Changing Woman, and Old Woman become characters from canonical western literature and popular culture—the Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Robinson Crusoe, and Hawkeye. This racial passing is undertaken to escape from Fort Marion.[96] Although Dee Horne writes that the four old Indians, "exemplify creative hybridity—subversive mimicry that is not assimilation," because they "appropriate what they want from both settler and First Nations cultures" (261), such mimicry is insufficient on its own. Native characters' appropriation of white identities is complicit with the homogenizing tendencies of dominant discourse as the identities they give up are Native, female, and elderly in favour of ones that are Caucasian, male, and young. They thereby reinforce the dominance of Eurocentric and patriarchal narratives by taking on those identities so that they can be recognized as agential subjects.[97] While their mimicked identities enable them to perform acts of resistance, they always end up returning to captivity in Florida, where they are being treated for "depression" (76), presumably as a result of the degree to which the world is being "bent" as Native culture is homogenized into the culture of the Western.[98] The cracks they inhabit through creative hybridity are always shifting and they are in danger of being crushed. It is only when the reader recognizes what is being marginalized by the necessity of this hybridity that resistance becomes possible.

The mimicry of the four old Indians is less of a viable option for the characters in the "realist" narrative. Lionel and Charlie, especially, are seen as characters who have disappeared into the dominant discourse but remain "other" because of their race. They are caught in a contradiction that controls them. This contradiction is articulated by Bill Bursum, who claims that, on the one hand, Lionel and Charlie "weren't really Indians anymore" (187), and, on the other, "[p]ower and control—the essences of effective advertising—were [. . .] outside the range of the Indian imagination" (128). Further, while Lionel might "be able to appreciate the superficial aesthetics" he would not, Bursum assumes, understand "the unifying metaphor or the cultural impact The Map would have on customers" (128). Lionel is, for Bill, both not an Indian and not an equal. As Bhabha suggests, "the desire of colonial discourse *is* a splitting of hybridity that is *less than one and double*" (116). Lionel is, on one hand, a less valuable subject than Bill and, on the other, doubled as both Indian and not Indian: this prevents him from being able to comfortably inhabit either position.

Eli is similarly divided. He tells Clifford Sifton that being an Indian is not a "profession" (141) but for most of his "professional" life he sought to distance himself from an identification as Native. It is only after he retires, after Karen and his mother have died, and after he has returned "home" that he recognizes, "[i]n the end, he had become what he had always been. An Indian" (262). His professional life did not allow him to escape this fact. His desire to stay away from his mother and Blossom and the Sun Dance does not change the fact that Karen "liked the idea that Eli was Indian" (163) or that the first time they have sex she says, "[y]ou're my Mystic Warrior" (164). His attempts to cut ties only allow him a degree of hybridity that is ultimately unsatisfactory.

It is only when he returns "home," sees the threat to the cabin his mother built, and gets an injunction to prevent the dam from generating power, that he "take[s] a 'step back' with regard to [his] everyday involvements in a collective identity in order to recognize that it *is* endangered, that it *should* be preserved and extended, and that this project requires that such a right be extended to *others* as well" (Angus, *Border* 160). This realization is not expressed in these terms in the novel and it is precisely the unspeakable nature of this realization that is crucial. When Eli first meets dam engineer Clifford Sifton, he "couldn't put a name to it, but he didn't like Sifton" (114). Later, reflecting on his decision to stay, we are told that, "Eli could see that he had never made a conscious decision to stay. And looking back, he knew it was the only decision he could have made" (263). Although the reason why this is the case is never made transparent by the text, Eli's decision suggests a conception of responsibility beyond individual desires which is, I will argue, "beyond all bargains and without an alternative" (Grant, *Justice* 30). As Grant argues, "[t]he modern conception of goodness does not include the assertion of a claim upon us which properly orders our desires in terms of owing, and which is itself the route and fulfillment of desire. In the prevalent modern view, owing is always provisional upon what we desire to create" (*Justice* 30). Further,

> the arrival in the world of this changed interpretation of goodness is interrelated to the arrival of technological civilization. The liberation of human desiring from any supposed excluding claim, so that it is believed we freely create values, is a face of the same liberation in which men overcame chance by technology—the liberty to make happen what we want to make happen. We are free, not only in what we want to make happen, but also in choosing the means. The whole of

> nature becomes more and more at our disposal as if it were nothing in itself but only our 'raw material.' (*Justice* 31)

Eli's presence in the cabin exposes the continuation of an outside to this view, a view in which, according to Sifton, dams "don't have personalities, and they don't have politics. They store water, and they create electricity. That's it" (111). In contrast, Eli shows that, "[i]t's the idea of a dam that's dangerous" (260). This dangerous idea is also seen in Bursum's Map, both the dam and the Map suggest a "fixed concept" of the world (Goldman, "Mapping" 34) in which chance is overcome by technology.

The Map: (Remote) Controlling Community

The contrast between the Native worldview and that of the white, male, patriarchs, is seen through Bursum's construction of the Map as a "unifying metaphor" of "control" (128). This illuminates the opposition between an abstract, universal, modern view and a communal, dependent, integrated one. As Bursum tells Lionel, the Map is "more than advertising" it is "a concept, a concept that lay at the heart of business and Western civilization" (298). While such a statement may seem ridiculously grandiose and, indeed, is so, serving to characterize Bill as a self-important fool, it also aptly encompasses the view of modern science and its connection to capitalism as a system of social organization. As Angus argues,

> [t]his economic system [capitalism], which attempts to incorporate within itself its own conditions of origin, is closely allied to the presupposition of modern science as it arose in the late Renaissance—that the world be viewed as standing apart from a subject who represents that world cognitively to itself. [. . .] By arraying

> the world in front of the subject, one may take a view upon the world and design representations of it. Thus the world can be interpreted as if it were an 'objective' order, since the knowing subject has been subtracted from participation in the world, and thus the world can be represented in front of a knowing subject who can master it conceptually. (*Border* 187)

Thus Bursum's claim—which links business and civilization to his Map, which he, by remote, controls from a seemingly objective, and omnipotent, position—is correct, at least insofar as it repeats the dominant, if erroneous, assumption of the modern age. Both depend upon a system of representation that depicts origins (land and labour) as elements within the system, and, therefore, self-enclosed and understandable. In the same way as Bursum is able to control the Map, nature and people can be controlled as they are abstracted to dollar equivalents. They become means to ends rather than ends themselves. Indeed, Bursum's Map depicts a continent taken from its Native inhabitants and from which the subsequent prosperity of the settler/invaders arises. As Goldman writes of Bursum's Map, "it offers a vision of wholeness, permanence, and stability; everything is known, named, and claimed" ("Mapping" 28). Bursum's Map, stands in then, metonymically, for both maps in general and the dominant narrative of society—one of control—that gives rise to a capitalist, individualist, economic system. Hayden White explains the prefiguring function of metonymy:

> [b]y metonymy, then, one can simultaneously distinguish between two phenomena and reduce one to the status of a manifestation of the other. This reduction may take the form of an agent-act relationship [. . .] or a cause-effect relationship [. . .]. And, by such reductions [. . .] the phenomenal world can be

> populated with a host of agents and agencies that are presumed to exist *behind* it. Once the world of phenomena is separated into two orders of being (agents and causes on the one hand, acts and effects on the other), the primitive consciousness is endowed *by purely linguistic means alone*, with the conceptual categories (agents, causes, spirits, essences) necessary for the theology, science, and philosophy of civilized reflection. (35)

Bursum's Map is a manifestation of the concept of Western civilization. The Map reduces the complexity of the world and reflects it back to Bill as objectively knowable. He is an agent existing behind the phenomenon of the Map, just as the scientists, engineers, and technocrats are the agents existing behind the phenomenon of the dam.

However, this abstraction of the rational subject from participation in the world prevents the movement between particular and universal. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker argue that technology, especially cyberspace, promotes physical isolation, what they call "bunkering in." They write, "[i]t becomes a pure will-for-itself: self-dwelling, closed down, ready to sacrifice all other interests for the sake of its own immunity" (96):[99] individuals behave as if they "have no relations." In addition to this self-protective motive, the "electronic self" "dumbs down" because of its necessity to work to survive and the simultaneous fear and rage this generates; the modern self oscillates between passive servitude to superiors and aggressive abuse of inferiors.

This can be seen, for instance, when Latisha fails to praise the jacket that George inherits from "one of [his] relatives" (192)[100] and later that night George "grabbed Latisha by her dress, and slammed her against the wall. And before she realized what was happening, he was hitting her as hard as he could, beating her until she fell" (192). A similar, although less violent, simultaneous process of self-isolation and abuse of inferiors can be seen in Bill Bursum, who "couldn't keep everything straight" (187) and will not give his sales assistant, Minnie, the honorific "Ms."[101] Further, he thinks it is ridiculous that when referring to "Indians" "[y]ou had to remember their tribe, as if that made any difference" (187). There is no movement from particular to universal; Bill simply asserts things from his isolation, assumes himself as cause and expects the rest of the world to respond as effects. When the world does not respond with the passivity he expects, he retreats to the mythic stereotypes of the Western, which reflect the world back to him as a set of expected effects. Further, he seeks to isolate himself through money: "[m]ake money. The only effective way to keep from going insane in a changing world was to try to make money" (188). This defence of sanity, though, might be read as precisely a definition of insanity: Bursum seeks to make enough money so that all of his interactions with others are within his control. As Grant interprets Plato, "the tyrant is mad because otherness has ceased to exist for him" (*Justice* 39). This is the position Bill desires, and it is the danger of this mythic idea that the novel interrupts. When *The Mysterious Warrior* is "fixed," by reversing the conventions of the Western and having the Indians win, the excessive productivity of otherness is made visible.

The selfish and self-entitled mythic view is not limited to the non-Native characters though. Charlie epitomizes this attitude at the beginning of *Green Grass* when he asserts that someone from the Native community, meaning himself, should benefit from the dam's exploitation of Natives and nature. Lionel, similarly, seeks personal advancement and does not consider how others will be affected by his actions. Horne says, Lionel "avoids his family and his obligations to his relations in pursuit of capital gain" (268). When considering the future of his relationship with Alberta he thinks, "he would talk to Alberta about his new life, about commitments, about babies. See what she thought about these things. See how her ideas fit in with his plans" (278). He goes on, imagining the conversation:

> "I'm going back to university. I expect to be a lawyer. Are you interested in coming along?"
>
> "I just want to be where you are."
>
> "What about your career?"
>
> "It can wait. I can always pick it up later."
>
> "And children?"
>
> "Lionel, I'd love to have your children." (278)

This imagined dialogue clearly shows a disconnection between Lionel's desires and those of Alberta, who clearly wants a child but not a husband. Lionel's attitude echoes that of Bob, Alberta's ex-husband, whom she divorced because he expected her to fulfill his expectations of a "wife": "[a]fter it was over, Alberta tried to remember the long, intimate conversations that they had had before they were married [. . .] [b]ut she couldn't remember ever saying or even hinting that she wanted to stay at home, and she didn't think she had ever suggested that she would be willing to put him through university" (87). The examples of isolation in the novel proliferate and characters' failures to recognize others as agents is a major concern of the text.[102] This failure is made most explicit, though, by Bill.

Bill's desire for control is manifested in his viewing of Westerns in which the representations of Native peoples are fixed, determined, and defined. He can watch them over and over again without fear that his cultural assumptions will be disrupted—the cavalry will come, the captive (white) women will be rescued by white men, and the Indians will lose the battle and their right to control their destinies. King has all his "realist" Native characters encounter the same representation in *The Mysterious Warrior*—either as movie or book—but their reactions to it reveal its failure to represent them. They all stop reading or watching before the end, offended, frustrated, or bored by the racist assumptions that underlie it. Angus argues that "[s]ocial movements emerge by naming and defining *as* problems situations that were previously accepted as natural" (*emergent* 99): having the stereotypes of *The Mysterious Warrior* viewed through Native eyes destabilizes their naturalness. When Christian asks Latisha, "[h]ow come the Indians always get killed?" (192), readers can recognize the destructive impact on a child of repeatedly viewing narratives that interpellate him/her as victim, loser, villain, etc. It interrupts the stereotyped narrative. As Bhabha writes, "the stereotype, which is [the] major discursive strategy [of fixity], is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place,' already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (66). While Brian Johnson is correct to argue that, "although the simultaneity of the viewing experience unites the viewers in time, they are paradoxically 'united' only by virtue of their isolation in space" (37), this isolation is overcome in part through the characters' subversive rejection of the narrative's racist assumptions and their final unification in space as well as time at the Sun Dance. Therefore, while King may "remain[] cautiously optimistic that, like the book, electric mass media can be 'adopted and adapted' to more accurately reflect divergent cultural perspectives" (Johnson 43), there is no indication that they can become the site in which community is located, or at which particularity can connect with universality. While refusing to read/watch the end of a particular representation can reveal its biases, it is also a capitulation: nothing can be done to change entrenched views, so it is best to ignore them, to become indifferent. Only Bill is at home in the "global village." Only he watches the movie until the end, shouting "[h]ooray!" (219) when the cavalry arrive. However, he is only at home there because he is "homeless," without community, in Blossom, Alberta.

Bursum's repetition of his favorite Western manifests the anxiety/ambivalence of the stereotype. In the end, the movie is 'fixed' in quite a different sense of the word, as the four old Indians alter the ending so that the Natives defeat John Wayne and Richard Widmark. That is, to "fix" the movie, its repetition of stereotypes must be un-fixed, un-moored, and made available for questioning. Goldman writes that "[t]he text implicitly suggests that readers must not simply revise the content of racist scripts, but challenge their fundamental conventions, specifically, the linear, monologic, narrative structure itself" ("Mapping" 29). While this works for Charlie who, in seeing his father play the hero for once, is able to see a positive element to a Native identification through the crack thus opened in the dominant discourse, Bursum is unable to confront these stereotypes/conventions and believes that, rather than the narrative being changed, his beloved technology has failed him. Bill is more willing to believe in a mechanical malfunction than the possibility of alternate narratives. Bill's answer is denial. He thinks the VCR must be broken: "[y]ou put your faith in good equipment and look what happens" (322). While a broken machine may be more acceptable to him than a broken myth, technological failure indicates the failure of the story as well since the story of progress depends precisely on faith in the reliability of technological equipment to create the world in our image, as it were. Opening a crack in the mythic story of the Western opens a view onto what this myth excludes: the useless difference of community that cannot be captured as a yield. Eli's resistance to the dam functions similarly.

The Dam: Building (Concrete) Myth

The dam is a technology which literally captures water, forcing it to yield a singular meaning: profit. As such, it works to further the dominance of human control over nature.[103] Cheryl Lousley explains the rational logic by which the dam prevents "excess" water from "being wasted" by capturing it as a yield: "notions of 'excess' water and 'waste' land are premised on an underlying assumption that nature is primarily a resource for human use and does not have an autonomous function or value" (Lousley, "Hosanna" 21).[104] Further, "[a]s a technology for colonizing free running rivers, the hydroelectric dam is an icon of twentieth-century mastery over nature in the name of progress" (Lousley 17)[105]. Angus argues that

> [d]omination, whether between humans or of humans over wild nature, consists in the domestication and control of excess. The concept of excess is thus a truly ecological one in the sense that it is prior to the distinction between humans and nature. [. . .] Excess keeps the system going, but finds no recognition within it, only the belated and diluted recognition of a yield. (*Border* 197)

This yield is what Charlie wants a piece of.

When Charlie—who represents Duplessis International Associates, the builders of the Grand Baleen Dam, against Eli Stands Alone—is questioned about his support for a project that will not benefit his tribal community he states, "then some of us should [benefit], don't you think?" (117). Such a competitive, individualistic, attitude is a product of the modern belief in individual autonomy, just as the Grand Baleen Dam is a product of the modern belief in human dominance over nature. These beliefs threaten the Blackfoot community because the dam prevents the river from flooding and thus threatens the cottonwood trees necessary for the Sun Dance ceremony. Charlie is operating from within a narrative of possessive individualism; Charlie accepts the "progress" represented by the dam as inevitable and his motives revert to self-interest, thereby separating him from the Blackfoot community: he believes in the story of progress and development and increasing individual prosperity and equality through scientific/technological advancement. There is, at this point, no outside to this story for him: communal identification is stopped at the border of the dam along with the water, and it is at this border that the individual identification begins. There is no movement between identifications with his particularities and a larger good, making him "sleazy" (116) in Alberta's reckoning.

The capture of Charlie within a "white" story that prevents movement between the particular and the universal order of which it is a part is a threat that extends to the Blackfoot community as a whole. This is shown by the danger posed to the cottonwood trees, which are essential for the Sun Dance (the central communal activity for the Blackfoot in the novel, discussed below), by the dam's prevention of yearly flooding. This flooding is both a crossing and maintenance of borders (river banks), an event occurring within an order not oriented toward human ends. Thus, the dam attempts to dominate both non-human and human nature: it not only captures "excess" water but threatens the continuation of the Blackfoot's ceremony, which is "useless" because it does not generate a yield. Without this ceremony, while the order that it provides access to would not be lost, that particular means of access would be lost.

Upon returning from Toronto following his mother's death, Eli Stands Alone moves into the cabin she built and engages in a protracted legal battle with Duplessis to prevent their dam from generating power. Duplessis builds the dam on Native land without consultation: "once Duplessis started construction on the dam, nothing stopped it. Environmental issues were cast aside. Questions about possible fault lines that ran under the dam were dismissed. Native land claims that had been in the courts for over fifty years were shelved" (118). They build despite the fact that a government report recommended three alternative sites, none of which were on Native land (111). These acts serve to reinforce a hierarchical society in which nature is readily commodified for white profit when it does not conflict with white interests and diversity is abstracted to conform within a human order. Sifton's claim that stopping the construction would be "too damn dangerous" (118) is symbolic of the progress of technological domination of nature as a project, which must be completed regardless of either the means or the ends because the alternative is too frightening to contemplate: facing it would require either a confrontation of meaninglessness or the acceptance of a necessary limit to human autonomy.[106]

Eli, on the other hand, recognizes the limit of his autonomy, yet resists the dam anyway. He recognizes the impossibility of his resistance returning the landscape to a pre-dam state: "Eli had to admit that after all the years of arguments and threats and injunctions, he had won very little. The dam was there. It wasn't going away. And, at some point in the future, Eli had no doubt that they would find a way to maneuver around him" (260). Eli, though, "had come to enjoy the small pleasures of resistance" (260). Eli is able to see that the system that enabled the dam to be built was not going to be overcome by his refusal to allow the dam to function. Nonetheless he takes pleasure in the particularity of his position which hinders the system, if ever so slightly. He refuses to "think of the dam as part of the natural landscape" (143), as Sifton instructs him to do.[107] All the same, as Charlie tells Alberta, "Duplessis isn't losing money" because "[m]ost of the money was put up by the province. The company gets to write the losses off their taxes" (118). That is to say that Eli will not bring Duplessis to its knees; they will not abandon the dam, even if he abandons himself to revealing the gaps in the logic that built it. However, his presence enables the continuation of his mother's cabin and his connection to that place, as well as preventing others from generating the yield they desire; and, of course, it enables the eventual destruction of the dam and the return of the river to its former course, although this also results in Eli's death. It is important that this "victory" over the dam is not the result of Eli's agency or liberty, although his actions create the conditions in which this "victory" can occur. Eli resists the problems of technological capture and homogenization in a small way, just as Hawkeye, the Lone Ranger, Ishmael, and Robinson Crusoe seek to "fix" the world on a small scale. Most importantly, though, his resistance creates a crack in the story of inevitable progress.

Eli's recognition of the tenuousness of his position is apparent in his awareness that eventually the dam company will find a way to maneuver around him, but he is not willing to quietly accept this as fate and his actions provide opportunities for others in the novel, and readers of the novel, to recognize an outside to the dominant logic at work. Bill asserts that Eli's mother's cabin cannot remain in place forever. Eli replies that it can remain “[a]s long as the grass is green and the waters run” (267). Patricia Linton suggests that this response, “encapsulates in sardonic humor his intention to stay, his awareness that the white establishment can displace him any time it decides to change the rules in its own favor, and his implicit accusation that the effort to take his own small plot reiterates the larger historical displacement of Native Americans from their tribal lands” (217). However, what follows moves beyond the merely “sardonic.” We read:

> [a]s long as the grass is green and the waters run. It was a nice phrase, all right. But it didn’t mean anything. It was a metaphor. Eli knew that. Every Indian on the reserve knew that. Treaties were hardly sacred documents. They were contracts, and no one signed a contract for eternity. No one. Even the E-Z Pay contracts Bursum offered to his customers to help make a complete home entertainment system affordable never ran much past five or ten years. (267)

Linton reads this passage as, “[i]n contemporary usage, the meaning of the phrase [“as long as the grass is green . . .”] has been inverted: it is understood to mean ‘not forever.’ But the slippage has occurred not so much in the text as the context—not the ‘forever’ of sacred documents, but the ‘forever’ of contracts, which *Eli* figures is at best five or ten years” (218, emphasis added). Similarly, Johnson reads the same passage as suggesting “*Eli’s* distrust of metaphor” (31, emphasis added). This passage, though, is narrated as free indirect discourse of *Bursum’s* thoughts. The conversation Bill has with Eli is remembered in-between Bill’s reflections on his fantasy cabin on Parliament Lake, which Eli’s cabin is preventing him from building, and his generalizations about Indians by which he attempts to reassure himself of his benevolent relationship to them. He “considered himself part of the family, always doing what he could to help” (267).

Finally, the section ends with Bill noticing what time it is and wondering why Lionel is late.

The point is that while Eli recognizes that his mother's cabin is not safe, he is not given over to an acceptance of its destruction as fate (though both Bill and Clifford Sifton importantly are) as would be suggested by his understanding of treaties as metaphor or contract. Eli's assertion allows the reader to see a crack in Bill's discourse by revealing the possibility of another story in which "should" is not always linked to an "if." Grant argues that, in modernity,

> the limitations put upon creating by the claims of others, whether nationally or internationally, are understood as contractual: that is, provisional. This exclusion of non-provisory owing from our interpretation of desire means that what is summoned up by the word 'should' is no longer what was summoned up among our ancestors. What moderns hear always includes an 'if': it is never 'beyond all bargains and without an alternative'. (*Justice* 30)

As "neo-pre-modern," Eli's understanding of the world maintains the possibility of a non-provisional sacred. Thus, the understanding of treaties as metaphor reflects, not Eli's acceptance that his claim can only last "at best five or ten years" (Linton 218), but Bill's, and further embodies the dominant society's use of discourse to repeatedly dispossess Native peoples: a shift in discourse from the sacred to contracts enables Bill to justify getting what he wants at the expense of Eli's inheritance and traditions. The story that Bill tells himself reduces the sacred, through metaphor, to the status of contracts, thereby justifying his selfish position that seeks to dispossess Eli and the Blackfoot in general. As Horne suggests, "[w]henever there is a discrepancy between reality and the constructed view of First Nations, settler society manipulates reality to suit its construction" (264). Bill's reading of the novel's title phrase is an act of appropriation through discourse, an attempt to close a gap in the discourse that Eli has managed to inhabit, to make reality conform to his construction of it. Similarly, the dam, in preventing the water from running, works to create a world in which an understanding of the sacred has no place. However, the re-presentation of these gaps in the novel prevents the reader from any longer accepting the story that Bursum and Sifton inhabit as "natural."

The dam, then, is resisted through the maintenance of the particular, Eli's mother's cabin, and, by extension, the communal property of the tribe. Most importantly, though, this resistance occurs through the story that this maintenance allows to appear. While Sifton claims, upon first meeting Eli, that his construction plans are "[n]othing personal" (114), this is precisely the problem with his view: the view of a landscape as abstract potential for electricity generation with no personal connection erases the need to consider what will be lost through this "advancement." Sifton's actions are not personal: he is merely a functionary of Duplessis, is just "doing his job," "following orders," but the story that justifies this lack of personal contact and responsibility is the problem. Sifton behaves as though he "has no relations." Other modern liberal subjects in the novel behave the same way. Bursum, although earlier claiming to consider himself part of the "family" misunderstands the Old Indians assertion that "[e]veryone's related" (298) when he says, "[t]hat's the way things are with Indians" (298). Similarly, First Woman tells God "[y]ou are acting as if you had no relations" (69) and Thought Woman tells "Young Man Walking on Water" that he is "acting as though [he has] no relations" (351). Andrews argues that this "criticism of Christ's behaviour echoes the Native North

American belief that everything and everyone are closely related; an individual's links to the world at large are considered to be as precious as blood ties" ("Reading" 110). The dominant worldview, expressed in these examples, is founded within the "Judaeo-Christian idea that history is the divinely ordained process of man's [sic] salvation" (Grant, *Philosophy* 40), which is followed, after the death of God, by the modern belief in progress through human willing. Eli's presence prevents the dam story from functioning transparently, he creates a crack in that story that makes it apparent as story.

The earthquake expands this crack. Bursum, Sifton, and Hovaugh, the three main examples of modern liberal subjects in the realist narrative, all yell "Earthquake" (410) and then Coyote yells "EARTHQUAKE, EARTHQUAKE [. . .] Hee-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee-hee" (411). The two nearly blank pages create a formal rupture in the text. The earthquake is an unpredictable form of excess. Instead of Bursum, Sifton, and Hovaugh's world governed by recognizable patterns that can be controlled by humans, we have a world governed by the order of the earthquake, Coyote, wilderness. The contrast is made obvious by having the two exclamations of "earthquake" on facing pages. As Hirsch argues, "[o]n the macro level, *Green Grass, Running Water* ends on a strongly positive note. Coyote's earthquake exposes not only the fragility of the dam, which it helps destroy, but of "the idea of a dam," the belief, endemic in Western culture, that human beings can impose their will on nature through technological legerdemain" (156). This belief is also countered by the Sun Dance.

The Sun Dance: Useless Community

The Sun Dance is the novel's central communal event. The danger the dam poses to the Cottonwood also threatens the public space of the Sun Dance. Without the Sun Dance, Blackfoot isolation and homogenization would increase as they would be effectively cut off from another element of their particularity. Dam technology seeks to limit, restrict, and quantify otherness. Lousley argues that, "[e]cological destruction, in the guise of development, thus repeats the explicitly assimilationist policies of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the Sun Dance was banned outright" ("Hosanna" 29). The means of domination have changed, but the outcome remains the same. That outcome, though, is not the universal and homogenous state of the end of history in either event. Rather it is the resistance and persistence of difference in community. A tyrant "must in the interest of the homogeneity of his universal state forbid every teaching, every suggestion, that there are politically relevant natural differences among men [sic] which cannot be abolished or neutralized by progressing scientific technology" (Strauss 211). However, while attempts to ban the Sun Dance attempted to abolish such difference, it is impossible to forbid, deny, or prevent difference from appearing "among" people. Angus states,

> the concept of community refers [. . .] to the human community within which the individual lives and works. But I am using it here to refer also to the natural environment that surrounds and sustains human life. The common denominator in these two uses is [. . .] *diversity*. It is not only that every human activity is surrounded and supported by other human activities and by nature. It is that these other surrounding activities are of a different type. (*emergent* 84)

Although community itself is not threatened by assertions of the primacy of self-interest and the inevitability of technological unification—both of which lead to the homogenization of society, as individuals seek to control rather than cooperate—particular means of accessing community are endangered. The dam, by killing the cottonwoods, reduces both biodiversity and cultural diversity.

The problem that King has to struggle with is the functioning of power in this elimination of diversity and the question of resistance. As Franco Rella explains, after Foucault it is impossible to claim a simple opposition to power, since "[p]ower speaks every language. It does not exist on its own, but only in the languages that it causes to speak, in the relations that it establishes [. . . .] Thus, 'it is always-already present, constituting that very thing which one attempts to counter it with'" (67). Power, though, depends on an origin outside of its forms of embodiment:

> this white space, lies outside every apparatus and knowledge, as does the empty center of power. And it is just this white space, that is not language and is not apparatus, that is the origin of every language and every apparatus, insofar as all discourses are produced in order to enclose it within the perimeter of words, to translate it into their networks, to articulate it within their technologies. (Rella 73)

The Map and the dam, as manifestations of power, seek to enclose the origin of that power, i.e. bio and cultural diversity, but they are resisted by a narrative that, instead of attempting to enclose the empty centre of power within the perimeter of words, uses words to open gaps in that perimeter, to crack the dam and show that this "white space" still exists. The novel reveals gaps in the perimeter of words that justify the dam and, by extension, modern technological progress; in so doing, the novel generates a clash with the discourse excluded by that perimeter, with the otherness of the Sun Dance. It forces a confrontation between "unclarified memories of when place and time were indices of belonging rather than arbitrary nodes on an infinite continuum" (Angus, *(Dis)Figurations* 154). This type of confrontation is the ethical moment. It raises the question of the relationship between how things are and how they ought to be.

As Geoffrey Galt Harpham has it, "the two questions that dominate ethical inquiry—How ought one to live? and What ought I to do?—suggest incommensurable points of view. The first reflects the distanced perspective of some de-individualized and ideal being free to consider laws and norms as such; the second, the particular perspective of a real person in an actual situation" (395). As a result, "the controversies that structure the history of ethics can never be settled, for obedience to one kind of imperative alone would be—unethical" (395). What can be done, though, is to explore these questions in narrative. When this happens, "[t]he reader is free and autonomous, and responsible for his or her construction of the text; but in order to make a plot at all, readers must believe that they 'perceive' it; they must submit to the text freely, but construct it as the law *of* the text. The text binds the reader, who binds the text" (Harpham 404). In constructing such a text, King "assumes the teaching role of the traditional storyteller, and he insists that we actively participate in the learning process. He trusts us [. . .] 'to draw useful lessons' from his stories, but he assists us in this endeavor by marking the trails through his stories, leaving us signs which, if carefully read, reveal not what we must conclude but what we should consider" (Hirsch 170). King asks us to consider the Sun Dance, to draw useful lessons from its appearance in the text as absence, from its status as the unspeakable sacred.

However, when one refuses to acknowledge this divided agency, to respect the otherness of the texts, to consider what King is pointing toward, domination occurs. When George Morningstar arrives at the Sun Dance and begins taking pictures, he is breaking the rule forbidding photographs, and is, thus, performing a kind of border crossing, but it is one that in this case promotes sameness and seeks to objectify diversity, thus reducing it to the system of market equivalency: "[c]ommodities have value both as useful goods and as an exchange, or money equivalent, of other goods. All goods produced for the market have this dual character" (Angus, *Border* 186). Thus, although George is crossing a border established by the Blackfoot, he is also seeking to enclose the empty centre of the Sun Dance's power by commodifying it, making it useful within the system of commodity exchange. The ban on photography at the Sun Dance attempts to prevent the event from being commodified as an exchange equivalent, to maintain its uselessness, its inapprehensibility, and therefore its power. Similarly, what King does not tell us about the ceremony in the novel both shows respect for this power (and the communal ban on representation of the ceremony) and performs the interruption of myth. It leaves a gap in the totalizing narrative of modernity that George tries to fill with photographs.

When George has his film confiscated, he is furious because the Sun Dance is valuable to him only as exchange equivalent: "You can't believe in this shit! [. . .] This is Ice Age crap! [. . .] It's the twentieth century. Nobody cares about your little powwow. A bunch of old people and drunks sitting around in tents in the middle of nowhere. [. . .] You all act like this is important, like it's going to change your lives. Christ, you guys are born stupid and you die stupid" (386). He has lost an opportunity to transform the intrinsic value of the Sun Dance into a socially relevant market value: to capture excess value as a yield profitable for himself. His desire to do this results from the fact that he has no access to its other value.

George's rage echoes dam engineer Clifford Sifton's claim that Eli "can't live in the past. My dam is part of the twentieth century. Your house is part of the nineteenth" (141).[108] The dam captures "excess" water and photographs capture "excess" value and both generate a yield, thereby suggesting that they have enclosed the empty centre of power even though they have merely simulated this capture. Therefore we can see that border crossing does not become a good in and for itself in the novel: there is a defence of intrinsic value and a desire to prevent this from becoming exchange value. The Blackfoot community is defended against the attempts of others to dominate and control it. As Goldman puts it, "[i]n the end, the escapees from Fort Marion, together with the community, fix the world by defending the Sun Dance against an intruder" ("Mapping" 37). This defence creates an opportunity, an opening, a crack, in which the reader can be receptive to the possibility of authentic otherness.

Rather than becoming another map of abstraction by which individuals can separate themselves from the world in an illusion of control (as with Bursum's Map and Sifton's dam as symbols of modernity), the Sun Dance presents an alternative map of integration by which individuals can locate themselves in the world as part of a communal and integrative whole that is beyond any single apprehension or comprehension. As Goldman writes, "the importance accorded to the Sun Dance only makes sense when readers understand that its goal lies in furnishing participants with a map of the universe in which their location is clearly demarcated" ("Mapping" 34).

Further, as a representation of the Sun Dance itself, *Green Grass, Running Water* "serves as a map—a tool with which one can reckon one's place in the world" (Goldman, "Mapping" 37), but this place is dependent on the specificity of individuals in their relationships to one another, and cannot be separated from this particularity. The novel is not a map that everyone can read, at least in the same way: it depends on the particular experience/knowledge that the reader brings to it for whatever meaning it will make. The Sun Dance, then, provides a map of the world, but a map that can only be understood from an understanding of the individual's position in that world as necessarily dependent; the reader becomes part of the map. This connection is lost through "objective" representations, particularly when, as in George's case, they are to be sold to make a personal profit by abstracting from intrinsic value. By avoiding this abstraction (by including the reader in binding the text), the novel provides a model, like the Sun Dance itself, for individuals to connect with the communal, which recognizes both that "[w]e're not in control" yet we "exercise a certain kind of conditioned agency" (Butler "Interview"). The Sun Dance depends on a pre-existent ceremony, a kind of text, but it does not occur unless individuals perform it; in a similar way, the text of the novel depends on readers.

As mentioned, Grant argues that, for the "ancients," "thought was finally a receptivity" (*Time* 61). Lionel, and the readers of the novel, are called to such a receptivity, although from a different tradition than that described by Grant. While Grant suggests that "what comes to us from that ancient thought is generally received as unintelligible and arbitrary" (61), it may be, rather, that the understanding of what is highest has always been unrepresentable, if not arbitrary. Lionel feels that he has missed something after he has helped repulse George (387). Although Grant claims that, "[b]ecause we are always surrounded in every conscious minute of our lives by the modern conception of thought, we cannot take what is given to us from the past as intelligible. If we take it at all, we take it more and more as sheerly arbitrary. Therefore, fewer and fewer people can appropriate it" (*Time* 63); in fact, Lionel is offered something from his tradition by the end of the novel which appears as not merely arbitrary. He has come, through protecting the Sun Dance, to another conception of time, one in which history is "enfolded in an unchanging meaning" (Grant 60), even if he is not fully conscious of it. His actions are something that, "[i]n the years to come [. . . he'll] be able to tell [his] children and grandchildren" (387). This implies that the unmarried forty-year-old Lionel will have children and that the "mistakes" that he has made in his life to this point will not determine the rest of it. He is not fated to perpetual subordination to Bill and a futile attempt to escape his particularity. By embracing that particularity in the defence of the Sun Dance, Lionel has helped to enable the continuation of a particular means of accessing the good.

While the text leaves it unclear as to what becomes of Lionel or what Lionel becomes, what his fate might be—"[p]recisely what, if anything, Lionel figures out, however, is open to question" (Hirsch 166)—possibilities exist where none seemed to before. Whereas his life, previously, was the sum of his "three mistakes" (30)—his "life is encapsulated in a comically flawed written record in which he is categorized as a health risk and a criminal" (Hirsch 157)—he now appears "on the verge of becoming" (Hirsch 166). What he becomes is up to the reader to create in the gap left open at the end of the novel[109]. The last words, "[a]nd here's how it happened" (431) undoubtedly point to the circularity of the novel, repeating words from the novel's opening (3), but now also serve as an invitation to the reader to continue the conversation. While readers may be excluded by the opening "so," they are now invited to tell the story again in an effort to get it right, understanding that this "rightness" exists in the telling, the process, in a movement from one's own toward the good.

Conclusion: Abjection

> When we represent technology to ourselves as an array of neutral instruments, invented by human beings and under human control, we are expressing a kind of common sense, but it is a common sense from within the very technology we are attempting to represent. The novelness of our novelties is being minimized. We are led to forget that the modern destiny permeates our representations of the world and ourselves. The coming to be of technology has required changes in what we think is good, what we think good is, how we conceive sanity and madness, justice and injustice, rationality and irrationality, beauty and ugliness.
>
> —*George Grant*, "Thinking About Technology" (1986)

> Just don't say in the years to come that you would have lived *your* life differently if only you had heard this story.
>
> You've heard it now.
>
> —*Thomas King*, The Truth About Stories (2003)

Belonging and Homelessness has focused on the literary genre called the novel. Indeed, "novel" is a paradoxical term since it suggests both "newness" and, to be categorized within a recognizable genre, conformity to certain recognizable conventions. While those conventions are more elastic for the novel than some genres, they still exist. It seems to me that the paradox of representing the novelness of our novelties is the challenge that the literary novel takes up. Some have questioned the political affiliations of *Belonging and Homelessness* because the novels it studies are "too literary," but, I contend, the "literary" novel remains a particular way that is novel enough, new enough, to challenge the common-sense assumptions about "what we think is good, what we think good is." At the same time, these novels are operating within "the very technology" they attempt to represent insofar as they are commodities produced for a market intended to generate a yield for both author and publisher. As such, they are complicit. I have tried to show some of this complicity, some of the excessive doubt that these "stories were intended to contain" (Kroetsch, *Lovely* 64). Nevertheless, these novels take up the challenge to "understand technological civilization just when its very realization has radically put in question the possibility that there could be any such understanding" (Grant, *Justice* 34). In contrast to Grant's lament of this realization as fate, the novels studied here offer hope for an understanding of technological civilization and suggest the continuation of alternatives to it. These alternatives come, necessarily perhaps, not from philosophy, but story. Grant himself suggests that, "[l]uckily many people are not much interested in such assumptions and just go on loving or being indifferent or hating" in the face of attempts to bring them under "objective control" (*Justice* 53), and to some extent, my exploration of these novels has sought to show that community cannot be eradicated, that people, as people, will continue to experience the sharing of an unworked community regardless of the aims of technological civilization.[110] Similarly, story, as story, will continue to generate meanings that exceed systematic yield regardless of the aims of transnational publishing firms.

While one of the things *Belonging and Homelessness* has attempted is to show some of the ways "post-modern" literature remains complicit with the structures it is trying to resist, it has also sought, I am sure less successfully, to bear in mind its own complicity with the structures it is trying to resist. This is a dissertation, submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is produced from within an institutional structure, and even if it is critical of that structure, if it seeks to resist it, it remains complicit with it, dependent on the privileges it offers (funding, mentoring, teaching, etc.). The dissertation is the pinnacle of the formal education process, but the form it takes, the form it requires, is very individualistic, despite institutional rhetoric to the contrary. It has taught me about time management, scheduling, efficiency, deadlines. In short, it has taught me how to work as part of a system that will capture my labour as a yield. Those lessons are opposed to the things I set out to learn and that I sought to open a space for in the process of writing this document: resistance, escape, excess, the good. However, what I have been struggling with throughout this process, and it has been both a struggle and a process, is what is possible in excess of such binary thinking, in addition to structuring relations as oppositions, complicity *or* resistance, belonging *or* homelessness. During the writing process I placed a number of quotations on my desk, sayings that seemed in some way encouraging. The first was from F. Scott Fitzgerald: "[t]he test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function" (qtd. in Elbow 50). *Belonging and Homelessness* has attempted this, as suggested by the conjunction of its title. It has been a personal exploration, an exploration of my particularities, a justification of those particularities, and, as such, it maintains that the institution of the university, where I have spent the last ten years of my life, can provide some access to the good. At the same time, it has attempted to avoid the temptation to mastery. It has tried to remain vulnerable, to recognize that my belonging here—in Edmonton, in the university, in Alberta, in Canada, in the world—is dependent on otherness. I am sure that I have failed at this task many times, that my intelligence has not always been "first-rate." Nevertheless, the existence of this document suggests that I have managed to "function," to some degree, and if that functioning reaches you, the reader, the unknown other, and suggests that the apparent binary of my title is not an opposition, even imperfectly, even if only as an intimation, then I will consider it a success because that will mean that my work has been unworked, that this has not all been an exercise in solipsism.

Belonging and Homelessness set out to redefine what "community" means in "Alberta" as a means of understanding my place in the world. It may be that such a task is doomed to failure: "[s]ite becomes place only through naming; naming fails to capture site when it encounters the groundlessness of its language. The border is no longer a place, but the discovery of place, a permanently endangered discovery of the silent civilizing moment in the ubiquity of madness, the Other's order" (Angus, *Border* 134). However, as my father-in-law would say, "it is only failure if you quit or don't learn something." The novels that I have examined show that the potential for such redefinition continues to exist, that the Other's order and community continue to exist and that representations continue to offer glimpses of this. They offer "intimations [. . .] of perfection" (Grant, *Time* 60) in their explorations of the limits of discourse, in their revelations of silence. Learning this, I have learned to hope. Despite their complicity with the system, despite their position within the system they are seeking the outside of, these novels are able to find that limit and peek beyond. Angus argues that,

> in a reflection that is oriented to the whole history of inhabiting, there must be also an experience of the limits of recapturing, a limit of thought insofar as it can claim to dominate its object. In this moment, English Canadian philosophy recovers wildness without subduing it, discovers in its own thinking a thought of the limit of thought, an abjection stumbling blindly at the edge of wilderness. (*Border* 203)

The novels that I have read here, with all their differences, share this thinking: a thought of the limit of thought.[111] Thinking this limit of thought recognizes the order within which the diversity of human orders exist. This thought reveals the incompleteness of the subject, the impossibility of its completeness, and, thus, enacts an abjection of the self. Existence, then, is never self-sufficient; it is always co-existence, community. In life, "never at any time are we autonomous (the maker of our own laws)" (Grant, *Justice* 113). In exploring this limit of thought in four novels I have also sought to think this limit.

I was raised on a farm, NW20-46-2-W4. In seeking to understand "my place in the world" I have learned that my place is never simply "mine." I would echo Angus:

> [i]n the same moment that we reflect on our construction of a home, the ineradicability of the wilderness must be brought inside as an acceptance of the locality of all belonging. This means acceptance of abjection, an abandonment of the world in which one belongs. Underneath all home-making is an absence of belonging, an absence of being a particular self. (*Border* 203)

At the same time, though, that "my" place is never simply "mine," never simply belonging, it is still necessary since "[p]articularity is not the opposite of universality but its condition, as universality is not the transcendence of particularity but its articulation" (Angus, *Border* 162).

Belonging and Homelessness is an attempt to justify my own, but it attempts to do that by engaging with otherness in an ethic of respect, which accepts "that something of what is essential to humanity will escape me" (Angus, *Border* 162). It attempts to defend what is good in what has come to "us" from Athens and Jerusalem (Grant, *Time* 60), to show that, "it *is* endangered, that it *should* be preserved and extended, and that this project requires that such a right be extended to *others* as well" (Angus, *Border* 160). Whether this attempt was "responsible" depends on you, the reader. As a limited, dependent, abject being I can only recognize my limits and defer to you, the other, for judgment.

Endnotes

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[1] Alison Calder and Robert Wardaugh make this point:

> [u]ntil recently, reading available historical and literary sources, it has been possible to believe that the Canadian prairies begin in 1850 or so, when the beginnings of intensive agricultural practices came to the West. It has also been possible to believe that the Canadian prairies have ended, or at least that time has ceased to pass here, judging by representations of the prairies in much literature and popular culture, and that we are permanently frozen in a rural, agricultural scene alternately coloured by the grainy, sepia tones of the Dirty Thirties or by the romanticized, golden glow of a nostalgic small-town sunset. (4)

[2] First-person plural pronouns always need to be questioned. As we will see, they serve to found interpretations of events even while claiming to represent neutrally. At the same time, though, as Jean-Luc Nancy has it, "we live with an irreducible demand that we be capable of saying 'we.'" Further, "[t]o want to say 'we' is not at all sentimental, not at all familial or 'communitarian.' It is existence reclaiming its due or its condition: coexistence" (*Being Singular* 42). As such, while "our Alberta story" is riddled with hierarchies and contradictions, some of which *Belonging and Homelessness* is intent on deconstructing, it is still necessary that we find a way to say "we," to move beyond the merely individual, solipsistic, identity politics, which mystify the fact that we come to be individuals because of our positioning within stories that precede and exceed our agency.

[3] Although the pork to be produced in Forty Mile was not intended for export to Taiwan—"Taiwan Sugar would not export pork back to Taiwan, a long-protected farm market that only recently began allowing meat imports" (Aussie-Pork-Net)—the profits would go to TSC, a state-owned corporation, and, therefore, presumably, benefit the people of Taiwan. It is also interesting to note that by 2003 Alberta was exporting 3.1% of its pork production to Taiwan. With production at 3.5 million that is nearly 110,000 animals a year to Taiwan, and growing. While the profits are going to companies other than TSC, it is unclear what impact increased production is having on the "communities" in which it is occurring.

[4] This is a view of the land that has dominated in Alberta from before the period of mass immigration. The Canadian government sold prairie land to pay for its nation-building initiatives and saw it as an investment opportunity for Eastern business. See below.

[5] Angus explains that, while "[t]he term 'contingency' is [...] a way of introducing into philosophy a concern with non-necessary, non-universal elements of a particular being's situation" it is also used to suggest the "'non-necessary,' in the sense of that which cannot be accounted for or explained" (*Border* 158). He goes on to clarify that, "[t]here are actually two different inflections here: one, the contingent cannot be *derived from* the universal; it is more than a mere example; and two, it cannot be accounted for or explained" (158). It is, he argues, necessary to recognize this distinction: "[w]hile the components of socio-historical location are contingent, in the sense of non-necessary and non-derivable from universals, identification with such components renders them essential for recognition of the identity of the individual or group in question. Identity comes about through precisely such processes of identification with practices and components of a world" (159). If that which cannot be derived from universals is seen as

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simply contingent and unnecessary, then its sacrifice can be justified in the name of something capable of articulating a claim to universality.

[6] See George Grant's *Philosophy in the Mass Age* for an accessible, and brief, account of this history of change from an "ancient" to a "modern" worldview. For Grant this change begins with the philosophy of Socrates, which posits that the universe is an understandable order, is furthered by the Christian promise of salvation as a moment in history towards which human life is oriented, and finds its fullest expression in the philosophies of Hegel and Marx, for whom universal community was possible on Earth.

[7] Grant's use of "North Americans" here is, obviously, exclusive, but, insofar as the settler/invaders of European descent that are included in his "North Americans" created the dominant story of North America, it is an important point. I take him to mean not that there are no alternative stories with connections to histories before the age of progress, but that those stories are marginalized.

[8] See Gayatri Spivak's "Philosophy" in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason.*

[9] William J. Weida, who submitted a report, "A Review of the Development Proposal for a Farrow-to-Finish Hog Operation by the Taiwan Sugar Corporation in the County of Forty Mile, Alberta, Canada" on behalf of those opposed to the project, argued,

> [r]ecently, agriculture has moved toward an industrial model of production--Intensive Livestock Operations (ILOs)--that exceeds the capacity of the land on which it is located to naturally process animal waste. In a fundamental sense, the ability of the land to naturally process animal waste defines the limits of sustainable agriculture. Agriculture can only be environmentally sustainable if it produces no more waste than the land available for waste application can absorb. Waste produced in excess of this amount must, at some point, be transferred off the land in the form of air- or water-borne pollution and when this occurs, the costs of this waste are shifted away from the land where the waste is generated.

[10] While Francis Fukuyama's claim that this has been achieved with worldwide liberal democracy and global capitalism has been widely criticized, he does succinctly describe the position: "Hegel's great interpreter, Alexander Kojève, asserted intransigently that history had ended because what he called the 'universal and homogenous state'—what we can understand as liberal democracy—definitely solved the question of recognition by replacing the relationship of lordship and bondage with universal and equal recognition" (xxi).

[11] In French the title is *La Communauté Désouvrée*, which might also be translated as *The Unworked Community.*

[12] Nikiforuk lists a series of statistics at the end of his article as "evidence" of the negative impacts of intensive hog operations. These include: "US studies show that mega-hog barns can depress the sale value of nearby homes and real estate by 10% to 40%"; "[c]ommunities with small hog barns have economic growth rates 55% higher than communities with mega-barns"; and "[a]lmost 70% of swine confinement workers experience one or more respiratory symptoms due to toxic air in mega-hog barns."

[13] While the Holocaust may be the most discussed modern failure to recognize the humanity of others, and has been critiqued as an anti-modern attempt to reverse the "modern" concept of "universal human recognition," it is paradigmatic in the sense that it

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was justified, by the Nazis, as a means of recovering a "pure" origin, of completing "community."

[14] Nevertheless, Alberta Pork, for instance, attempts to represent Alberta in this abstract way to suggest the potential for expansion of the industry when it states that, "[u]nlike some of the major hog producing regions in the States, Alberta continues to have a land base sufficient to support increased hog production" and follows this claim with a chart showing hog density:

Region	**Hogs per square mile of arable farm land**
North Carolina	1,248
Iowa	547
Manitoba	198
Alberta	44
Saskatchewan	18

However, such a chart does nothing to account for environmental and population differences, nor to suggest what the maximum carrying-capacity of hogs per square mile might be. It also implies that every square mile of arable land is exactly the same as every other regardless of its proximity to hogs. If the majority of hogs are located within a small area or a series of small areas, so that the waste they produce exceeds the capacity of the land-base to absorb it, it is of little importance that there are other areas with fewer hogs such that the average remains relatively low.

[15] While I agree with Nancy that, "[a]ll our political programs imply this work: either as the product of the working community, or else the community itself as a work" (*Inoperative* xxxix), this should not be accepted as an excuse for political quietism (and I must acknowledge the irony that it is my "work" to attempt to describe, analyze, and explain something that "is only experienced"). Rather, with Miranda Joseph, I would advocate "finite, situated, [and] processual efforts to articulate political projects" (xxix), such as the resistance to TSC. That is to say that while Nancy's critique of modernity's communities is instructive, his conclusions do not provide a satisfactory means of resistance, and the fact that he has published his theorizations shows that he is willing, at least to some extent, to do more than accept the community we have as a result of our socially constructed existence: the community that it would be impossible to lose since we are human.

[16] Frank Kermode asks, "[m]ay we not admit that we are slaves to limit? May we not speak of places or realms, and of books and perhaps of lives and of the world at large, as having recognizable though fictive bounds, as affording instances of the kind of error without which a certain species of being [humans] cannot live?" (80). Kermode is responding to Derrida and deconstruction, recognizing the power, and even the necessity, of aporia, différance, undecidability, etc., yet, at the same time arguing that this process has a (human) limit:

> a continual attention to the operations of differance, even supposing that it is always provided by thinkers of the highest quality, even supposing that it is necessary by the purest standards of intellectual hygiene, may not be humanly supportable; that even if this is the way things really are most of us may still have to behave as if they were otherwise. (73)

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[17] Nancy explains:

> [w]hat counts in art, what makes art art (and what makes humans the artists of the world), is neither the 'beautiful' nor the 'sublime'; it is neither 'purposiveness without a purpose' nor the 'judgment of taste'; it is neither 'sensible manifestation' nor the 'putting into work of truth.' Undoubtedly, it is all that, but in another way: it is access to the scattered origin in its very scattering; it is the plural touching of the singular origin. This is what 'the imitation of nature' has always meant. Art always has to do with cosmogony, but it exposes cosmogony for what it is: necessarily plural, diffracted, discreet, a touch of color or tone, an agile turn of phrase or folded mass, a radiance, a scent, a song, or a suspended movement, exactly because it is the birth of a *world* (and not the construction of a system). (*Being Singular Plural* 14)

[18] While we need not agree with the gender essentializing, Kroetsch's assertion that, "[e]xternal space is the silence that needs to speak. It is male. The having spoken is the book. It is female. It is closed" (*Lovely* 73) does encapsulate this paradox of the printed book as story.

[19] Geoffrey Galt Harpham argues that the relationship between formalism in textual analysis and reader-response theory is an ethical one. He writes, "[t]o hand plot over to an all-licensed, plotting reader would be to make a dog's breakfast of narrative theory, which could no longer count on even the most minimal understanding of its central component." However, "[a]n 'ethical' approach to the dilemma of narrative theory would begin by conceding the strength of both formalist and reader-centred positions, and making of these apparently incompatible claims the cornerstone of its understanding. Plot is a construction of a particular narrative that uses only materials in that text." At the same time,

> [t]he reader is free and autonomous, and responsible for his or her construction of the text; but in order to make a plot at all, readers must believe that they 'perceive' it; they must submit to the text freely, but construct it as the law *of* the text. The text binds the reader, who binds the text. Where, then, is the law? In both, that is, in the relation between the two: the relation of reader to narrative text provides a compelling instance of the free submission of the subject to the law. Understanding the plot of a narrative, we enter into ethics. (404)

[20] As Kroetsch has it, the writer attempts to contain the meaninglessness of the world, and the critic reveals it: "[h]earing the silence of the world, the failure of the world to announce meaning, we tell stories. [...] As critics we elaborate the doubt that our stories were intended to contain" (*Lovely* 64).

[21] While I believe this approach may be undertaken through various art forms, literature is the focus of this project.

[22] As Angus writes, "[w]hile the elements of socio-historical location are contingent, in the sense of non-necessary and non-derivable from universals, identification with such components renders them essential for recognition of the identity of the individual or group in question" (*Border* 159). It is literature's special quality that enables a mediation between the particular and the universal. As Harpham puts it, "[n]arrative plot [. . .] provides what philosophy cannot, a principle of formal necessity immanent in

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recognizable worldly and contingent events that governs a movement toward the eventual identity of *is* and *ought*" (403).

[23] As Calder and Wardaugh argue, the "prairie" has become a recognizable and marketable stereotype that can be reproduced productively by writers. As they say, "insistence on regional distinction is partly motivated by market forces, as prairie writing becomes a cultural product to be commodified: for it to retain its value in the market, it must be identifiably 'prairie'" (10).

[24] Kroetsch: "[n]ot origins, but beginnings. Origins recede into history. Beginnings recur" (*Lovely* 15).

[25] The question of responsibility is aporetic, though, as Derrida shows:

> [s]aying that a responsible decision must be taken on the basis of knowledge seems to define the condition of possibility of responsibility (one can't make a responsible decision without science or conscience, without knowing what one is doing, for what reasons, in view of what and under what conditions), at the same time as it defines the condition of impossibility of this same responsibility (if decision-making is relegated to a knowledge that it is content to follow or to develop, then it is no more a responsible decision, it is the technical deployment of a cognitive apparatus, the simple mechanistic deployment of a theorem). (*The Gift of Death* 24)

Thus, the question of responsibility is undecidable, but it is, as such, of the utmost importance as it enables us to focus on the conditions of belonging without attempting to prescribe what those conditions are. In writing about Alberta literature I am doing my duty in responding to the call of the others to Alberta's dominant myth (if only in a particular academic, intellectual, and institutionally complicit way), but I am, at the same time, sacrificing all of the other others whose calls I might be spending this time heeding.

[26] Indeed, this goal continues to be sought by racist, essentialist, and paternalistic legislation such as Canada's Indian Act, which defines who qualifies as a "status Indian" by reference to previous definitions of who qualifies as a 'status Indian,' and thanks to the "two-generation cut-off clause" of Bill C-31, the marriage of status Indians with non-status for two generations results in the permanent loss of status for all children. Thomas King states that, "right now about 50 percent of status Indians are marrying non-status folk. No one knows for sure how long it will take, but according to John Borrows and Leroy Little Bear, two of Canada's leading Aboriginal scholars and teachers, if this rate holds steady, in fifty to seventy-five years there will be no status Indians left in Canada" (143). For more see King, "What is it About Us That You Don't Like?" in *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative.*

[27] The impact on Native peoples of policy reflecting this ideology is shown by Sarah Carter in "Two Acres and a Cow: 'Peasant' Farming for Indians of the Northwest, 1889-97."

[28] See Irene Spry, "The Tragedy of the Loss of the Commons in Western Canada" for an account of how the prairie commons were systematically replaced by private property interests. She notes, specifically, that "[i]t became evident, as private property rights expanded, that the only hope of Indians or Metis to retain some of the space to which they were accustomed would be by securing from the government recognition of their claim to the extensive areas over which they wished to be free to roam as they had always

done." However, "[t]hey were ignorant of agricultural criteria and failed to envisage the limited amount of land thought to be necessary for a sedentary life. The extent of the reserves for which they asked seemed unreasonable and was unacceptable to white men thinking of agriculture" (216).

[29] This can be seen in discriminatory immigration and refugee policies, the Chinese Head Tax, the rejection of African-American settlers due to "medical" reasons, the denial of voting rights to Natives, etc.

[30] While it is certainly possible, and common, to identify across borders, the border still generates difference. This is seen in the common immigrant experience of returning to the "home" country only to find that it no longer feels like "home." More troubling, perhaps, is the Native experience in which the Canada-U.S. border divides peoples (see Thomas King's "Borders" in *One Good Story, That One*) such as the Blackfoot Nation in Alberta and Montana. King's story reveals both the arbitrariness of borders, but also the reality of their material consequences.

[31] As Pamela Banting notes, "[d]espite westerners' desire to think of the west as wilder than the east, our landscape is one of the most altered in North America. It is estimated, for example, that Manitoba's tallgrass prairie constitutes 1/20th of 1 percent of its original extent" (14). This eradication of wilderness is coupled by an alienation from that which remains. As Sharon Butala shows, the people with first hand knowledge of particular land can be separated from it by the abstraction of scientific language. For instance, she writes, "a [...] botanist explained to me that what we folk call 'buffalo grass' has a scientific name, *Bouteloua gracilis*, which is really something like a third cousin to what scientists have declared is the 'true' buffalo grass" (113). However, while "[t]he Prairie Provinces now depend less on agriculture than on resource extraction and industrial production, [...] their dominant image remains that of the wheat field, the grain elevator, and the isolated farmstead on a rolling glacial plain" (Hudson 274). The need, then, is for a new story that recognizes these conflicting factors.

[32] Norm Sacuta's review of the recent anthology *Writing the Terrain: Travelling through Alberta with the Poets* (2005) notes that while the collection is "fascinating for what it reveals about the shaping of landscapes in the consciousness of a people" there is "something strange [...] when the poets get beyond points north of Edmonton. The details of the poems become almost exclusively observational and no longer interactive. There's little coming to grips with the enormous forests and spaces in the north of the province" (58).

[33] Cf. Kermode above, fn. 16.

[34] This is evident in the current federal rhetoric over "arctic sovereignty" and the construction of the north in terms similar to those used to construct the prairies is important work (see Hulan and Grace).

[35] Spry, for instance, focuses on the year 1870, when Rupert's Land was transferred (sold) to Canada, and the following surveys, censuses, expeditions, and treaties that served to promote settlement: this resulted in higher competition for resources previously held in common, resulting in scarcity, and the institution of private property rights to manage this scarcity.

[36] The decision "to create two provinces of equal size divided by the fourth meridian" (Friesen, *Prairies* 239) was made by Wilfred Laurier to prevent Conservative control of a

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single large western province. The result of this was to move the borders of the southern District of Assiniboia and the central District of Saskatchewan (where *Crow* is set) east and divide the northern District of Athabasca in two.

[37] The game is called "schmier," the German equivalent of the English "smear" but homonymous and synonymous with "shmear," also spelled "schmear" and "schmeer" with the meanings of "flatter, grease, smear" and "bribery, corruption, flattery" as well as being used in the phrase "the whole shmear" suggesting "everything (possible or available) every aspect of the situation" (shmear). It is significant, then, that the men construct the "schmier" game as a microcosm of the world in which they can claim to control "every aspect of the situation." Their willingness to sacrifice for this control suggests the temptation of meaning that is fundamentalism. When they determine to send one of their members to find John Skandl, to make up for a lack within their system, they play "until one man had all the real money" (106) i.e. "the whole schmier."

[38] Kroetsch explains his interest in origin stories in conversation:

> I somewhere recognized that this business of the source story, the Genesis story, also implies multiplicity. Behind us is not one culture, but ten cultures or fifteen cultures. The roads of the Bronze Age are in our past somewhere. It's a strange thought. It is as exciting as the ships that discovered the New World, in a sense. I think I hit on this multiplicity in *What the Crow Said* [. . .]. Even in the Genesis story one discovers that there are three versions, one on top of the other. (*Labyrinths* 118)

[39] Immanuel Kant argues, in *The Critique of Judgement,* that, "without the development of moral ideas, that which, thanks to preparatory culture, we call sublime, merely strikes the untutored man as terrifying" (115). Gayatri Spivak writes, "[t]o the raw man the abyss comes forth as merely terrible. The raw man has not yet achieved or does not possess a subject whose *Anlage* or programming includes the structure of feeling for the moral" (14). This programming, or "preparatory culture," is what allows the "cooked"/"tutored" man to be consolidated, and, through the exercise of reason, confront the abyss and transcend it. The storytelling in *What the Crow Said* can be understood as an attempt, by the men, through their communally-generated narrator, to exercise reason and transcend the natural sublime with which the novel opens. As Kroetsch himself has said, "[h]earing the silence of the world, the failure of the world to announce meaning, we tell stories" (*Lovely* 64). Confronting the silence of the abyss, our response is to tell stories. At the same time, "[a]s critics we elaborate the doubt that our stories were intended to contain" (Kroetsch 64). As is implicit in Kant and made explicit in Spivak, the storytelling depends on "preparatory culture" and it is doubt about this that Kroetsch elaborates alongside the storytelling impulse to containment.

[40] While Tiefensee argues that, "Kroetsch's play does not resist the rules of the game in the least" since she takes Kroetsch's use of play to suggest that it "is the godgame that the writer plays with his characters and readers in his quest to become the telling hero" (181), this does not prevent the reader from resisting that play. Kroetsch cannot undo the system of the game that he has constructed, but the reader can, as Tiefensee's book shows, and Kroetsch's statement acknowledges.

[41] Cf. Kermode above, fn. 16.

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[42] Kenneth Hoeppner has suggested that "[t]he real problem of the community is its isolation—the road didn't get built. In the first draft Kroetsch comments: "*road* as central metaphor in the book: building or not building of road, effect of road: bring/keep out civilization" (233). While the quotation from Kroetsch suggests a more ambivalent position than Hoeppner's claim that isolation is the "real problem," "how the road never got built" (1) is one of the things that "people, years later" blamed on the bees. If we accept my premise that these "people" are the dominant white males of the Municipal District, then the failure to build a road is not simply a "problem." The problem is the road as metaphor, its ability to bring or keep out "civilization," to overcome or maintain limits.

[43] Or, more accurately, Liebhaber wants it to distinguish him, but generally fails to get the recognition he desires. His gift is not all that unique in Big Indian, given the similar talent of Vera's Boy. This talent, and the recognition Vera's Boy receives for it enrages Liebhaber, as does the recognition of any of his rivals: "[e]veryone else had nothing but praise for Vera's Boy" (124). After the flood we are told that Liebhaber "wanted to get a little credit for his memory of the future. He just wanted a little credit" (184). The fact that Vera's Boy dies in the flood may be evidence that Liebhaber succeeds in overcoming his rivals, as Tiefensee argues, but the other inhabitant of the district with a gift for prophecy, Old Lady Lang, precedes Liebhaber's presence in the novel and remains at the end. In the first chapter we are told that, "[s]he had been there from the beginning" (4) and in the final chapter she is once again "breaking the sprouts off last fall's potatoes" (194). It is "the night Old Lady Lang read fortunes" (80) that the card players flee Tiddy's house. It is Old Lady Lang, fondling her "special ball of sorrow" (39) throughout the novel, mourning "the inevitable absence" (4) who, in contradistinction to Liebhaber's quest for knowledge, doesn't "want to think about it" (4, 175)

[44] Cf. Blanchot: "Wittgenstein's all too famous and all too often repeated precept, 'Whereof one cannot speak, there one must be silent'—given that by enunciating it he has not been able to impose silence on himself—does indicate that in the final analysis one has to talk in order to remain silent" (56).

[45] This notion of enclosing the other in an embrace differs importantly from Angus' notion of the "embrace" of one's own in which a justification of

> [p]articularity [. . .] involves an *embracing* of a cultural identity, not just inheriting it. The step back begins from the experience of affective belonging that is one's own, which requires that other belongings be seen from the outside and justified in an ethics of difference. The step back thus discloses that the condition for the appearance of any universality is the particularity that can connect one to the universal only through others. Access to the universal requires respect for other particularities (*(Dis)Figurations* 84).

This respect for other particularities is what is missing in Liebhaber's attempts to control excess through work. He seeks to embrace *otherness* to achieve universality.

[46] I am thinking here of Derrida's argument in "On Forgiveness" where he writes, "it is necessary, it seems to me, to begin from the fact that, yes, there is the unforgivable. Is this not, in truth, the only thing to forgive? The only thing that *calls* for forgiveness? If one is only prepared to forgive what appears forgivable, what the church calls 'venial sin', then the very idea of forgiveness would disappear" (32).

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[47] In *Labyrinths*, Kroetsch says,

> anecdote breaks down the control asserted by myth. I resist many of the obvious mythic patterns. Let me give you an instance: the Tower of Babel is more and more a myth that intrigues me yet I have gone totally away from the kind of biblical reading that says it was such a terrible disaster. [. . .] I now think that it was a great thing, one of the greatest things that has happened to mankind. From the Tower of Babel all of a sudden, we gain all the languages we have. (116)

Kroetsch, here, performs the reversal of binaries that is the first stage of deconstruction: rather than accepting the increase in diversity as punishment, he views it as a gift (yet still from God, a non-human, universal good). Nevertheless, it only comes about in opposition to, and rejection of, the attempt at unity/singularity. That is to say that, even if viewing creation of linguistic diversity as a good, gaining "all the languages we have" is the result of striving for singularity. Without striving for unity, without seeking to reach God, humanity, according to the myth of the Tower of Babel, would never have received the gift of linguistic diversity. Thus unity and diversity are shown to be mutually dependent, and we have the movement between opposites that is the free play of deconstruction's second stage. Thus, "God" rewards human striving with the gift of diverse particularities. In *Crow*, the men's striving then, though absurd, cannot be summarily dismissed. It is necessary, even if only for what it produces and/or reveals in its failures. The narrative of the quest remains important for what appears in its interruption.

[48] I am thinking, here, of Judith Butler's discussion of "vulnerability." In an interview shortly after the invasion of Iraq, she states, "at a certain point it is absolutely ethically necessary, after one has been injured very deeply, that one not respond in kind. That movement of non-violence breaks the cycle of revenge" and "[r]evenge tries to solve the problem of vulnerability. If I strike back, then I am not vulnerable but rather the other person is. I transfer vulnerability from myself to the other." Further,

> [t]he quick move to action is a way of foreclosing grief, refusing it, and even as it anaesthetizes one's own pain and sense of loss, it comes, in time, to anaesthetize us to the losses that we inflict upon others. I think that an entirely different politics would emerge if a community could learn to abide with its losses and its vulnerability. It would know better what its ties to other people are. It would know how radically dependent it is on its interrelationship with others. I think that would lead in fact to a multi-lateral international understanding of justice, or at least it could. I think we would be able to understand something about the general state of fragility and physical vulnerability that people—as humans—live in. Our increased attunement to that could only make us more humane. But I'm afraid that we've gone in the opposite direction and sought to eviscerate our own vulnerability and to establish our own impermeability. ("Interview")

This discussion of revenge, it seems to me, applies both to physical acts of aggression and revenge and to representational violence. When one group speaks for another they are, most often, establishing their own impermeability, whereas an expression of vulnerability opens one to the possibility of otherness, to a recognition of dependence on that otherness. In *Obasan* Naomi is caught between strategies of impermeability: the exclusion of her particularity from the national narrative, Obasan's silence and isolation, and Emily's action that ignores the pain she inflicts on Naomi. Naomi seeks an

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alternative that will protect her particularity and open to the possibility of otherness; the structure of the novel mirrors this strategy, as we will see, and depends on Naomi's acceptance of her own vulnerability.

[49] *Itsuka* (1992), the sequel to *Obasan*, suggests that Kogawa does not strictly adhere to the metahistorical view Goellnicht ascribed to her in 1988. Unlike *Obasan*, *Itsuka* suggests that historical wrongs can be righted ("redressed") and this correction represented in fiction. However, his analysis of *Obasan* as historiographic metafiction is sound, although his appropriation of the novel as a national narrative charting Naomi's move from silence to speech, which "helps us as a nation to come to terms with our identity" (302) seems to contradict the earlier troubling of suggestions that this identity exists and can be known.

[50] As Heather Zwicker argues,

> the past produces the present, which, in turn, does not make sense except through its history. Less obviously, the disruptions of linear narrative suggest that racism—the kind behind internment—cannot be considered merely an isolated incident. Though there are specific acts in identifiable moments that are clearly racist, their effects reverberate, making the past and the present bleed into one another. Whereas the discourse of national progress relies on unequivocal movement from the past to the present, *Obasan* suggests that history is not so simple, because the past never quite stays put. (153)

[51] As Grant argues, "the absurdities of time [. . .] are to be taken not simply as history, but as enfolded in an unchanging meaning, which is untouched by potentiality or change" (*Time* 60).

[52] Arnold E. Davidson suggests that, while "Naomi has not yet been told that the yearly visits commemorate the fate of her mother" "[n]evertheless, on some level she knows—or at least suspects—what she, and her uncle, cannot articulate. For the flower she 'always' takes back with her is picked in symbolic mourning for her missing mother" (*Writing* 30).

[53] In a recent article reporting on *Obasan* being named the official book of the city of Vancouver, Joy Kogawa is quoted as recounting "the sense of alienation she has experienced, even in 1986 on the day she received her Order of Canada when another recipient waiting with her to receive the award told her that he'd 'been to your beautiful country.' She said: 'I've been to yours too. I was born in it'" ("Book's acceptance").

[54] I have in mind George Grant's discussion of "faith," in "Faith and the Multiversity," where he argues:

> 'Faith' is one of the central words of western thought which has had many meanings. What I intend by it is Simone Weil's definition: 'Faith is the experience that the intelligence is enlightened by love.' Such a sentence, of course, simply moves one from the uncertainty of 'faith' to the even greater complexity of the word 'love'. [. . .] What is first intended is that love is consent to the fact that there is authentic otherness. We all start with needs and with dependence on others to meet them. As we grow up, self-consciousness brings the tendency to make ourselves the centre, and with it the commonsense understanding that the very needs of survival depend on our own efforts. These facts push us in the direction of egocentricity. When life becomes dominated by

> self-serving, the reality of otherness, in its own being, almost disappears for us. (*Justice* 38)

This connects to Butler's notion of "vulnerability" in that such an experience of faith makes us vulnerable, depends on a belief that when we give up our own impermeability and ego-centricity the response of the other will not be to continue the cycle of revenge.

[55] Chinook jargon was a lingua franca on the Pacific Coast of North America that combined indigenous and European languages: "a relatively simple trade language of the Pacific coast of North America based on Chinook, with words from Nootka, Salishan, English, and French. Chinook jargon was formerly used by American Indians or First Nations peoples and Europeans in their dealings with each other" (Chinook Jargon).

[56] See McFarlane.

[57] See McFarlane re: the cover of the 1983 Penguin edition of *Obasan*.

[58] See Brydon ("Lament"), Cheung, Zwicker, Amoko.

[59] The novel is structured around an opposition of speech and silence, with each pole connected to one of Naomi's aunts and each aunt connected to either the modern or mythic consciousness described by George Grant in *Philosophy in the Mass Age*. He writes, "[t]he most characteristic belief of modern man [sic] is that history is consciously and voluntarily made by human beings" (15) whereas "people of ancient cultures" "did not believe that human beings make history" but "saw events as the pale shadows of divine realities, the temporal as the mere image of the eternal" (15). This mythic view of the world is embodied by Obasan, whom Naomi equates with "every old woman in every hamlet in the world" (16). Emily, on the other hand, asserts that, "[t]he past is the future" (45) with the belief that both can be remade in the present.

[60] This is not, as McFarlane claims, a transcendent understanding that synthesizes the views of her two aunts. While he claims that, "[b]y the end of the novel [. . .] Naomi learns that to attend both the sound of Obasan's stony silence and Aunt Emily's linguistic rage demands a pathos capable of bearing witness to the loving intentions of both" (405), I would disagree that "[l]earning to attend to this love" means "to conflate differences" as "part of Naomi's maturing process" (405). It is not "her ability to transcend the silences and gaps in the fractured text of her family and community with *yasashi kokoro*, itself conflated with Christian love that would make the word flesh" (405) that marks maturation. Indeed, the novel ends with precisely a gap that Naomi, explicitly, does not deal with, and which prevents the closure of a structure in which, "'Japanese' and 'Canadian' have become conflated in the pathos of universal love" (405). The memorandum shows the continuation of a distinction between "Japanese" and "Canadian" even among those "Canadians" with the best of intentions with regard to their "others." There is no wholeness for Naomi, the nation, or the novel. Further, the fact that Naomi's mother remains in the photograph, the wounds are not healed, and the limbs do not learn to dance shows the inadequacy of Naomi's mother's simple adherence to the ideal of *yasashi kokoro*. It leads to them being "lost together in [their] silences" (267). Her adherence to this ideal results in her final words being "[d]o not tell" (265). Naomi's recognition that, "[o]ur wordlessness was our mutual destruction" (267), does not mark an acceptance of *yasashi kokoro* as a transcendence of silence; the wounds remain unhealed and excessive. Naomi's recognition of her mother's love provides solace, but does not, as Macfarlane argues, unite the two parts of herself. Indeed, the novel shows

Naomi's multiple identifications—with Natives, animals, insects, weeds, as well as with her two aunts and her mother, not to mention her grandmother, Stephen, her father, Isamu, Nakayama Sensei, the Grand Inquisitor, Goldilocks, the Littlest Bear, Momotaro, Rapunzel, and so on—that cannot be resolved into a singular identity or subjectivity. Rather, she moves between these various identifications and the possibility of a larger, universal, unifying order, which remains "without incarnation" (Angus, *(Dis)-Figurations* 78) if these particular identifications must be sacrificed or differences conflated.

[61] Naomi questions: "[i]s it enough that we were once together briefly in our early Vancouver days?" (269). While the memory of this togetherness might help to sustain Naomi, it was not, in "reality," the kind of togetherness that she claims it was, or that Emily insists upon earlier with, "the Nakanes and the Katos were intimate to the point of stickiness, like mochi" (20). Despite these claims of unity, Naomi has heard stories of how, "[w]hen Mother was a young child, Grandma Kato left Grandpa Kato [. . .] and returned to Japan. I don't know how many times Grandma went to Japan, but each time she took Mother and left Aunt Emily and Grandpa Kato behind" (20). Brydon notes, "even in her nostalgia for that lost perfect past before racism disrupted all certainties, Naomi recognizes another memory that contradicts her nostalgia. Old Man Gower stands for the disruption of community that was always there. The confidence of unproblematic belonging is forever denied us" ("Lament" 466). Or, as Smaro Kamboureli writes in relation to Old Man Gower's abuse, "the site mother and daughter inhabit is already contaminated" (212). Further, Kamboureli points to the "genealogy of the novel's historical events" and the history of the "Oriental Problem," noting that,

> [a]lthough this history is ostensibly glossed over by Naomi's idealized family memories, it is referred to, albeit briefly, by Emily in her first diary entry: 'We're used to the prejudice now after all these long years' (80). Here the reader is invited to consider a history that had already begun before Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, to read the text through events that are not directly addressed in *Obasan*. (186)

Emily also notes that, "the war was just an excuse for the racism that was already there. We were rioted against back in 1907, for heavens sakes!" (36). This history provides a clear contrast to the supposed pre-internment unity of the Japanese Canadian community in the larger British Columbian and Canadian society, suggested by the Tillicum Club's motto—"we're all friends together"—(part of a national narrative of progress).

[62] See McFarlane.

[63] A. Lynne Magnusson suggests that this may be "a sign that she [Naomi] will enter Emily's (and Kogawa's) wordy world" (66).

[64] The novel involves a woman "infiltrating" the male space of a geological field camp. J.L. is the camp cook, but when a gold deposit is discovered she stakes her claim along with the men to ensure that the entire claim is covered for "the Company."

[65] van Herk has claimed in interview that Arachne, the picaresque heroine, in *No Fixed Address*, avoids the traditional options of reform or death given by male writers to female picaros ("Restless" 167). However, disappearance is only a marginally different option as it prevents the possibility of, is unable to represent, an unrepentant and enduring female subjectivity in the known world.

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[66] This is true both in the sense that most people will never visit Ellesmere Island and thus only have access to it through various representations (documentary films, maps, travel writing, novels, etc.), but also in the sense that even those who visit Ellesmere will "read" the geography through their senses and the socio-cultural interpretive framework they bring with them and through which they make "meaning" out of "landscapes."

[67] Marlene Goldman shows how van Herk is engaged in "infiltrating" the dominant masculine discourse of the prairies as outlined by Annette Kolodny: "during the pioneer period of American history, the settlers promoted the myth of the land as woman. In many instances, mapping the new land was likened to the possession of a 'virgin continent.' Although Kolodny's study is limited to the settlement of the United States, her findings are applicable to the physical and literary appropriation of the Canadian landscape as well" ("Earth-Quaking" 22).

[68] Critics have tended to refer to the "you" of the text as the "speaker," the "narrator," "her," or even "van Herk." To avoid this reduction, but also to maintain clarity and readability I will change the font to indicate that when I use "speaker," "narrator" and so on this is meant to hold open the complexity of the narrative "you" as a character in the text, the protagonist, the narrator, van Herk, Anna Karenin, geography, the reader, etc., and not simply all of these things at once but to varying degrees depending on the context in which it appears in an irreducible complexity that cannot be adequately described. The narration of *Places* will be discussed in more detail in the section "Narrating the Limit" below. I will use "van Herk" where I refer to Aritha van Herk, author of *Places Far From Ellesmere*, the historical, material person beyond the textual construction of "you" in her geografictione but who has various similarities to that construction.

[69] In writing of Betty Lambert's novel *Crossings*, van Herk describes a method that might be applied to her own writing: "[t]he writer is entering the world of the male novel, so far his exclusive territory. To do this is terrifying, and yet the only way to destroy the territoriality of fiction is to enter the story, be prepared to sacrifice oneself, participate in the destruction, drop the shelter of fiction by women that pretends that relations between men and women are resolvable, that their worlds can merge, thus freeing oneself of the prescriptions that prevent women from discovering an epic fiction of their own, outside of male definition/ domination/destruction" ("Double Crossings" 283).

[70] As in Gayatri Spivak's discussion of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and the subsequent revision in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* where she claims that, "Bhubaneswari [in her suicide] attempted to 'speak' by turning her body into a text of woman/writing" (308), which Spivak sees as an ultimately failed attempt, Anna Karenin's suicide might be seen as her last desperate attempt to write/speak. This attempt has gone unread through one hundred years of (male) literary criticism until van Herk's un/reading, made possible, like Spivak's re-reading of Bhubaneswari, by a western education and academic position: "the moot decipherment by another in an academic institution (willy-nilly a knowledge-production factory) many years later must not be too quickly identified with the 'speaking' of the subaltern" (Spivak 309). Thus, van Herk's un/reading of Tolstoy's novel is not a simple expression of the silenced Anna (as Spivak's representation of Bhubaneswari's story does not mean that she has managed to "speak"). Rather, these representations are complicit in the apparatuses they seek to

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escape and resist because they appropriate the machinery, to use Sharpe's term, that silences the subaltern.

[71] See the discussion of conventions in Chapter Two.

[72] Robert Kroetsch claims that, "[a] great deal of Canadian writing centres on the small town or the isolated community—and I suspect this is revealing in the ways it announces the hesitation we feel about our meta-narratives" (*Lovely* 30). van Herk's representation of Edberg might be understood as a struggle with meta-narrative: Edberg fails to provide her with a viable meta-narrative, so she searches one out elsewhere.

[73] Angus explains: "[w]hile the components of socio-historical location are contingent, in the sense of non-necessary and non-derivable from universals, identification with such components renders them essential for recognition of the identity of the individual or group in question" (*Border* 159). Thus, what the landscape means is contingent, but it is necessary that people be able to identify with a particular meaning for it.

[74] The complexity of the narration makes any simple distinction between "langue" and "parole" impossible. The speaker is speaking out of her particularity, but this "her" is always already an "our" and embodies the relation between complicity and resistance that inheres in any resistant speech/writing.

[75] As MacLaren points out, even when van Herk writes the beer parlour scene in *Judith* it is a place where the female is not permitted (xviii): "[s]he was on her feet and facing them, that pack howling like coyotes in their field, brave because they were not alone, one supporting the other" (*Judith* 142). Interestingly, *What the Crow Said*, published the same year as *Judith*, has a beer parlour scene in which the men dispute a woman's right to enter (see Chapter Two).

[76] As Angus argues, a defense of particularity requires that one recognize that, "it is endangered, that is *should* be preserved and extended" and "that this project requires that such a right be extended to *others* as well" (*Border* 160).

[77] Cf. The discussion of indigeneity in *Obasan* in Chapter Three.

[78] While this may have been an appropriate mode of living , the government sought "settlement," understood through the ideal of yeomen farmers (see Sheila McManus).

[79] Geoffrey Galt Harpham argues that, "the fact that any choice can be reconciled with 'principle' also means that any choice can also be shown to be *in*compatible with principle or *un*ethical because it violates some other, entirely credible principle. Thus every 'ethical' decision violates some law or other, and violates it precisely because it is 'ethical'" (396). Further, "[n]o matter what settlement is reached with some other or other, there will always be some *other* other demanding our attention" (404).

[80] The "you," importantly, despite its multiplicity, does not seem to include Native subjectivity. van Herk has explained to Clayton that, "my writing doesn't relate at all to First Nations experience, because I think that's territory that is best claimed by First Nations women. I can only write about the world that I have access to" ("Restless" 170). Thus First Nations' experience remains outside the text, and the speaker, while able to point toward that outside, is unable to represent it.

[81] For example, while Ellesmere may be "[u]naltered much by []man" (105), it contains "a National Park (official)" and, as a result, "you pick no flowers" (107), adhering to the rules that cover even this "clean-swept northern desert of desire" (105).

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[82] van Herk suggests that it is the fact that Anna reads and writes for which Tolstoy punishes her: "you realize that Anna is condemned because she reads" (130); "Karenin does not lose Anna to Vronsky; he loses Anna to a novel" (135); "[r]eading persists as the most dangerous activity any character can engage in" (135); "Anna's reading is her act of educating herself, reading herself into an unreading of how she has been read. More notable: Anna writes. Oblonsky claims that she is writing a children's book, but it is clear that what Anna is doing when Tolstoy is not looking is writing herself, and the Anna who reads is a front for the Anna writing her own passionate involvement with her own story" (137). We might, then, read her death as a sacrificial act of writing/speaking. Neuman: "[w]hat van Herk's narrator un/reads on Ellesmere is 'an Anna in imagination' (137), one who writes—a children's book, the novel tells us, but that is incidental. Most importantly, she writes 'herself' (139). That is her ultimate adultery. Belonging 'to herself' (138), she has 'written' an autobiography against the grain of the cultural discourse that, defining her as a woman, would represent her with her writing hand cut off" (n.p.),

[83] Marlene Goldman argues that "[t]he role played by the earthquake in King's text recalls Aritha van Herk's rejection of the desire to 'fix' the prairie by imposing what Rudy Wiebe described as 'great black steel lines of fiction' [. . .] To an extent, her feminist project mirrors that of King's" ("Mapping" 39).

[84] Not only does the earthquake in the novel reveal the persistence of natural excess beyond the control of "men of technique" like Clifford Sifton and Bill Bursum, but the suggestion that the earthquake is caused by Coyote dancing (416) opens onto another kind of explanation. This "other" explanation is beyond the rational-scientific understanding of tectonics, beyond Dr. Joseph Hovaugh's plotting of "occurrences and probabilities and directions and deviations" in terms of "literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogic" categories (King 389).

[85] As mentioned in Chapter One, first-person plural pronouns always need to be questioned. This may be especially important when non-indigenous peoples write about indigenous peoples given the history of appropriation in that relationship. However, I maintain that, "we live with an irreducible demand that we be capable of saying 'we'" (Nancy, *Being Singular* 42), and it is my contention that *Green Grass, Running Water* moves from the particulars of Native identity towards this possibility. As Bud Hirsch has it, King's stories "concern identifiably Indian experience, certainly, but the wide range of universal human experience as well, and we ourselves play a crucial role in the creation of meaning" (170). This creation of meaning, here, occurs through my particular experience of the novel in relation to my particular understanding of philosophy, literature, history, etc. It is my hope, and belief, that such a creation can occur in such a way that it does not simply repeat domination.

[86] Ian Angus critiques Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* on the basis that it reinscribes this notion of limitlessness,

> [w]hereas a concept of a border requires that one theorize the constitution of an inside-outside relation within politico-cultural space, Hardt and Negri define externality through a geographical determinism and internality through politico-cultural space. This unaccountable divergence of registers means that they can never investigate the constitution of an inside-outside relation but resort to a continual rhetoric of 'no outside' that pervades the narrative but which cannot

> formulate the necessity of the outside to the constitution of the inside. ("Empire, Borders, Place")

This rhetoric works to mystify the externality of Mexico, Canada, and Native Americans to the U.S. American Empire.

[87] Discussing the character of Monroe Swimmer in *Truth and Bright Water*, King explains that,

> Monroe Swimmer, who comes back from Toronto, this famous Indian artist [. . .] has enough money to change the world [. . .] yet the ways in which he tries to change the world in some ways don't make any kind of sense. Painting Indians back into a picture which they are bleeding through might be an interesting exercise, putting iron buffalo on the prairies is an interesting exercise, painting the church out of existence is an interesting exercise. He goes through all of these things, putting kites up in the sky to teach the sky about blue, and platforms in the grass to teach the grass about green. But in the end it doesn't save Lum. It doesn't save Tecumseh. Doesn't save Soldier. (King, "Border Trickery")

Eli, in *Green Grass*, the English professor who returns from Toronto, on the other hand, exposes play within the structure of political and social thinking by abandoning his safety and comfort in a political act of resistance.

[88] Begin: Roy Kiyooka, one afternoon in Nanaimo, saying to me: the new myth of beginnings. Listen to them: Pat Lane, George Bowering, George Ryga. Listen to Gladys Hindmarch. Listen to Barry McKinnon, to Fred Wah. It's the Western Canadian myth: the artist from the distant place, from the bookless world.

> I'm from a farm, I said, way hell and gone out in Alberta.
> I'm from Moose Jaw, Roy Kiyooka said.

Beginnings: there were four grades to a room in the Heisler school. [. . .] Purely by accident, I read two books that puzzled me [. . .] Twenty years later, in graduate school, I chanced to discover both again. They turned out to be Joseph Conrad's *Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*. Recognitions. [. . .]

Beginnings: we had a big farm, the work was done largely with horses. The hired men slept in the east room. Sometimes, in that room, I found stacks of pulp magazines. [. . .]

Beginnings: I was alone. I was a dreamer. I like to fix fence: I could be alone all day [. . .]

Beginnings: I drove a horse and buggy to school, in the spring and fall, a horse and cutter in the winter [. . . .] I hated to touch a whip to a horse. Each school-horse of mine grew fat; and in its slowness I learned the seasons [. . .] I made stories [. .] To this day I can't walk from my parked car to my office without inventing a story.

Beginnings: talk. People talked where I grew up [. . .]

Beginnings: a Cree from the Hobbema reserve. A baseball pitcher [. . .] threw the first two pitches straight at my head [. . .] After that I stood too far back from the plate. Only years later did I understand that I'd met The Trickster.

Beginnings: my grade twelve English teacher, Mrs. Aylesworth [. . .] She told me I should set out to become a writer. No—stern, fierce-eyed—she dared me to become a writer [. . .]

Beginnings: when I was almost twenty-one I received my BA from the University of Alberta and I missed the graduation ball in order to fly north to work as a labourer on the Fort Smith portage [. . .] an aspiring writer should go out and seek experience in the

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world beyond books. From that first year in the north I remember most clearly being taken to bed by a Métis woman [. . .]

After six years spent largely in the north I sat down in a room in Montreal to write a long novel. I wrote a short story called 'That Yellow Prairie Sky' [. . .]
Beginnings: at the age of twenty-seven I entered graduate school [. .] I had one hell of a lot to learn about literature. About writing [. . .]
Begin again: I wrote my first poem when I was thirty-two [. . .]
Begin again: I published my first novel when I was thirty-seven [. . .]
Begin: the body writes the poem. You must stand close to the plate [. . .] (*Lovely* 9-11)

[89] Hirsch asserts that "[m]ost of [King's] readers enjoy insider status and that is why King makes sure that, at least on some level, they experience what it feels like to be an outsider. *Green Grass, Running Water* involves multiple forms of discourse [. . .] [v]irtually all readers will initially stand outside one or more of them—which is exactly what King wants" (158).

[90] John Berger argues that "[h]ome was the center of the world because it was the place where a vertical line crossed with a horizontal one. The vertical line was a path leading upwards to the sky and downwards to the underworld. The horizontal line represented the traffic of the world, all the possible roads leading across the earth to other places. Thus, at home, one was nearest to the gods in the sky and to the dead in the underworld. This nearness promised access to both" (56). Marlene Goldman shows how the Sun Dance represents such a mapping of the world:

> [t]he Sun Dance circle is variously described as the sacred hoop/or the mystery circle, and, as many Native spiritual leaders have argued, it serves as a tangible model of the universe. At the centre of the circle is an altar, also in the shape of a circle, in which a cross has been inscribed. The lines of the cross are oriented to the four cardinal points and represent the four winds; hence, at the centre of the Sun Dance is a map of the Sacred Circle. Within this map of the cosmos, the dancers move in a sunwise or clockwise direction in harmony with the motion of the earth. ("Mapping" 35)

[91] Even the "I" narrator, who "only wants to [tell the creation story] once" (38), is engaged in process and repetition and is unable to control his/her "other," Coyote.

[92] Interestingly, water is arguably present from before the "beginning" in the Genesis story as well. Depending on the interpretation (and, I assume, the translation from Hebrew which I have neither the expertise nor the time or space to investigate here) of "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1: 1-2), one might argue, as John Milton does in *Paradise Lost*, that the creation was not *ex nihilo* but an ordering of a preexistent chaos. That is, in the beginning, there was a formless earth and waters, to which God added form. Alternatively, as the orthodox view would have it, and which King follows, the passage suggests that God's first act of creation was of the building blocks of the universe which he subsequently ordered.

[93] While this provides an answer to the question of "where does God come from?" it, obviously, does not provide a "pure" origin, since even at the "beginning" Coyote and the water are already present. Similarly, the modern scientific theory of the "Big Bang" does

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not, insofar as I understand it, account for the source of the matter/energy that created the universe as we "know" it.

[94] Thus, as King states in interview, the character of Dr. Joseph Hovaugh "not only is a stand-in for God—in the Jehovah joke that plays there—but he also is a stand-in for that American attitude that if you imagine something to be this way then you can make it be that way just because of who you are" (King, "Border Trickery"). That is, Hovaugh is the modern liberal subject who believes in history as progress. As Grant explains, in the "humanist view of life" it is "Man [sic who] makes the world, and there is no overall system that determines what he makes. [. . .] We create value, we do not participate in a value already given. We make what order there is; we are not made by it" (*Philosophy* 37).

[95] Of course, the suggestion that Biblical truth is somehow given and self-evident does not follow "naturally" and, indeed, the references to eyes and ears in the Bible are mostly about a failure of the senses to penetrate the "truth" or, perhaps, the impossibility of the "truth" being perceived through the senses. The first such reference appears in Deuteronomy when Moses complains about the Israelites failure to follow the Lord despite the miracles He has performed for them: "to this day the Lord has not given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear" (29.4). This failure of perception runs like a refrain throughout the Bible. King plays on this Biblical notion of understanding. When George first attends the Sun Dance he is full of questions. Latisha tries to apologize for his behaviour by explaining to her father that, "George is inquisitive" (339). Her father asks, "His eyes okay?" followed by "Guess his ears work, too" (339), suggesting that if George paid attention he would be able to understand the meaning of the Sun Dance without needing someone to explain it to him. However, because George seeks to possess truth through mastery he is unable to recognize the meaning of the ceremony as a process.

[96] They initially end up in Fort Marion because they are unwilling to be appropriated by Biblical patriarchs as Eve, Noah's wife, Mary, and an unnamed woman who receives no acknowledgement for helping Christ calm a storm, or by white literary "heroes" as their "Indian friends" Tonto, Queequeg, Friday, and Chingachgook.

[97] Only those "in the know" (like Babo) recognize that they are women (even Lionel and Charlie are unsure of their age and gender (123, 252)), and the figures of power (soldiers, guards) in the mythic narratives mistake them for white men, while those in the realist narrative (Dr. Hovaugh, Sergeant Cereno) recognize them as Indians but still think they are men.

[98] This "Western" is both the Western European intellectual/philosophical tradition and the western North American narrative of "Cowboys vs. Indians."

[99] Judith Butler describes a similar impulse by which we seek "to eviscerate our own vulnerability and to establish our own impermeability" ("Interview").

[100] According to Flick this is George Armstrong Custer (158).

[101] Sergeant Cereno, similarly, has difficulty accepting Babo's request that he refer to her as "Ms." (23), but insists that she call him "Sergeant" (24).

[102] Alberta enjoys having two men when each is more than 200 miles away; Charlie spends much of the novel alone in his apartment or a hotel room or eating by himself; Latisha's business keeps her away from her children leading to resentment on the part of

Christian; Dr. Hovaugh and Bill each enjoy sitting alone waiting for the day to start ("[e]very day, he sat a little longer [. . .] he was pleased" (16, 268)); Lionel doesn't visit his parents or the Reserve regularly; Eli often only sees Clifford Sifton; many characters sit alone and watch (or read) *The Mysterious Warrior*. One of King's main narrative techniques is to record dialogue that is really two overlapping monologues. Each character expresses his/her own desires with no consideration for the other. This isolation prevents a recognition of dependence on otherness and social action: it is only when the characters come together at the Sun Dance that they are able to initiate a collective response to an external threat. This is the small act of "fixing up the world" that the four Old Indians undertake—they provide Lionel with a sense of belonging that had been lacking in his life (something to fight for)—and in which they are successful even though Lionel feels as though he has "missed something" (387). In all of these cases except the Sun Dance, there is no community, no public space/sphere in which communal action can occur.

[103] The novel unworks this myth in a number of ways, some of which this chapter outlines. Water symbolism is one which I am unable to adequately explore here. However, the original and excessive nature of water in the novel repeatedly reinforces the failure of the dam to contain and control it: from its presence before the "beginning" of the novel, to the overflowing toilet at The Dead Dog Café; from the mysterious puddles into which the Pinto, Nissan, and Karmann-Ghia disappear to the rain that impregnates Alberta, water creates diverse and indeterminate potential meanings in the text. See Andrews "Reading" (99-101), Fee and Flick (133), Goldman ("Mapping" 34), and Lousley ("Hosanna" 37) for some preliminary discussions.

[104] In her study of the representational history of the North Saskatchewan River, Myrna Kostash notes Marjorie Campbell's articulation of this view:

> [Campbell] believed that it was time that 'scientifically acquired facts' replace traditional 'feeling' in a discussion of the future of the waterway. She had in mind, for example, the fact that the annual flow of the Saskatchewan River is some 18-million acre-feet by the time it gets to the Saskatchewan-Manitoba border, having drained off 150,000 square miles across the prairie steppes, 'enough wasted water to irrigate hundreds of thousands of acres of dry land.' Campbell was impatient that this uselessly free-flowing water should be tapped for its potential. (126)

[105] Don Gayton describes this mastery as hubris:

> [h]ubris is vital. It is the brashness, the distaste for the status quo, and the ability to change the world. My hubris has driven me to modify the earth, so that its patterns and mechanisms become obvious, so I may learn and grow from its response. Hubris was passed down to me from Jehovah, who commanded me to first name the things of the earth, and then:
>
> > 'fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'
>
> I did that.
>
> Dams were truly the apogee of my hubris. I trained self-confident men and put them in arrogant institutions to build dams. I asked them to bring rivers, the

> wildest, most random and most vital of earth's essences, under my control. They responded magnificently [. . .]
>
> My hubris was unique to western North America: it was my New World birthright. I thought it was different from all the rest, I thought I could go on this way forever, because of the grandness of my landscape, and my youthful overconfidence. I did a hundred misdeeds to the continent in the name of hubris. (142)

[106] Grant describes the modern struggle: "[m]astery comes at the same time as the recognition that horizons are only horizons. Most men, when they face that their purposes are not cosmically sustained, find that a darkness falls upon their wills" (*Time* 42), others, the nihilists, continue willing for the sake of willing (45). Sifton feels it would be "too damn dangerous" to consider these options.

[107] In contrast to Gary Snyder's claim that, "human beings are still a wild species" (qtd. in Angus, *Border* 196), and, by which logic, all human acts, including the building of dams, could be seen as manifestations of "wilderness," as "natural," Angus argues that, "[t]here is a conflict within humanity such that some attempt to domesticate others for their own purposes. It is true that the species as a whole is not domesticated, but there is a process of domestication within humanity that is coextensive with the exploitation" (197) of land and labour.

[108] Sifton compares Eli with Bartleby from Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener" following his implicit justification for the necessity of progress—"My dam is part of the twentieth century"—claiming that the point of the story is that, "this guy has lost touch with reality" (142). While a comparison between Eli and Bartleby would be worthwhile, as they both serve to reveal gaps in dominant "common-sense" discourse, it is beyond the scope of this project. Suffice it to say that the connection Sifton makes completely misses the point of Melville's tragic depiction of the dehumanization of labour by capitalism and, similarly, fails to recognize the real parallel to Eli's situation in which dam economics ignore the intrinsic value of nature and privilege some human lives and life-ways over others. Sifton can only see that both Bartleby and Eli fail to conform to "the way things are" and, therefore, he dismisses them as out of touch with "reality" (142).

[109] In conversation about his first novel King says, "When I finished *Medicine River* people wrote me and said 'Why didn't you get Will and Louise married' [. . .] I said 'Why would I do that?' [. . .] And I'm thinking to myself, don't you understand that at the end of the novel if you want them married you can marry them. If you want them to get together you can make them get together. You as a reader can create that for yourself" (King, "Border Trickery").

[110] What might happen if we cease to be "human," what the development of "post-humanism" might mean in this regard, is beyond my scope here. It is, though, a question that shakes the foundations of the argument forwarded in *Belonging and Homelessness*, that troubles its premises, and, which, therefore, needs to be asked, at some point, by someone, in a much more rigorous way.

[111] What this "limit" is, undoubtedly, is different for the four novels studied here, but they share an engagement with indigeneity. Tracing how this engagement functions in Alberta literature of the last fifteen years, how it has changed and how it has continued, is a task waiting to be undertaken.

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